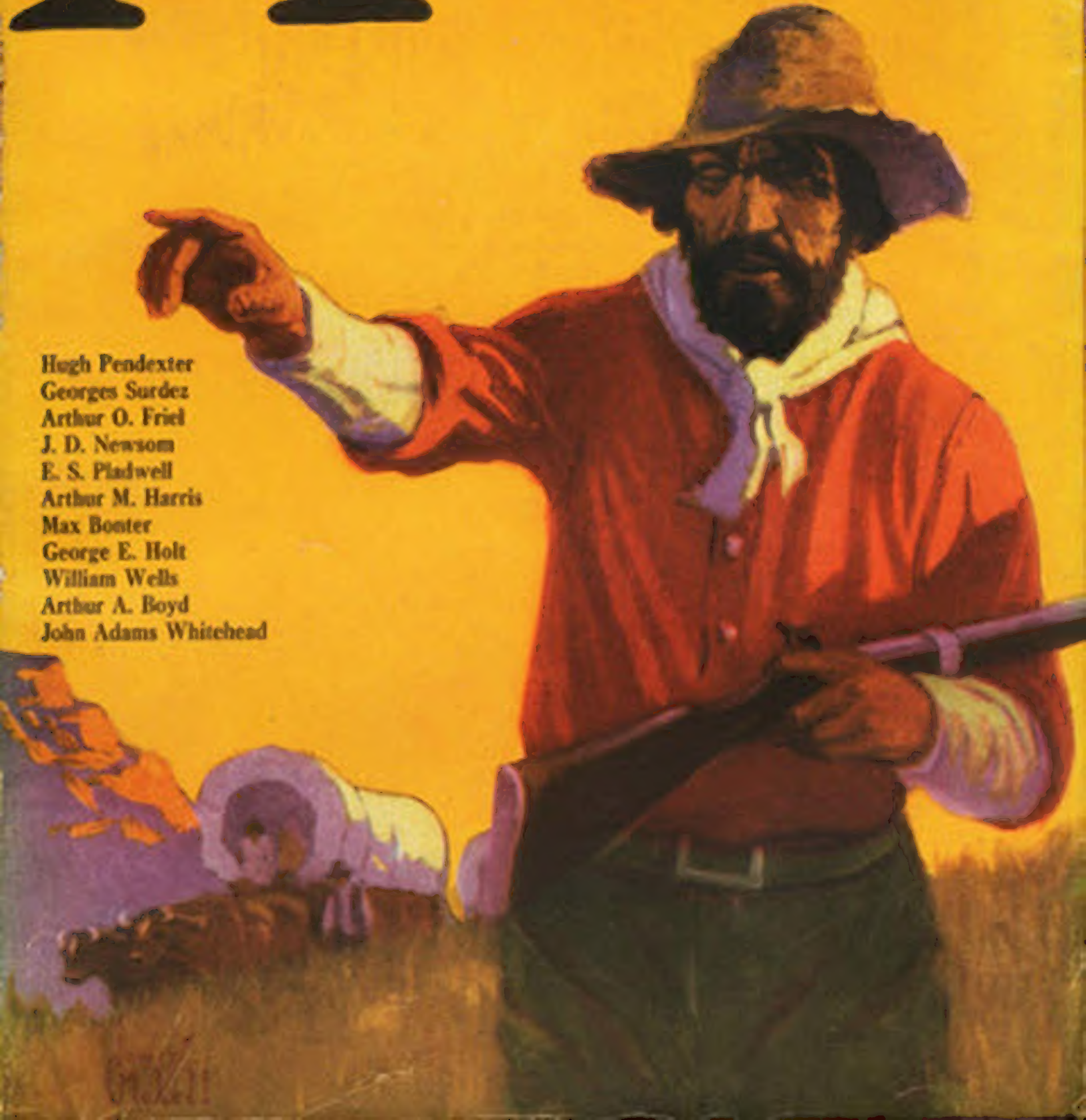
FEBRUARY
20th
1923
25¢

PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure



Hugh Pendexter
Georges Surdez
Arthur O. Friel
J. D. Newsom
E. S. Pladwell
Arthur M. Harris
Max Bonter
George E. Holt
William Wells
Arthur A. Boyd
John Adams Whitehead

Let Us Make Room for *You* In This $5000-a-Year Class

Homer D. Minor
of Texas
"Six months after I started my magazine subscription work I cleared over $1,000.00. My business increased over one thousand per cent. last year."

Harry Bushnell
of Pennsylvania
in his spare time earns from $25 to $100 a week through magazine subscription work.

Ralph Young
of Ohio
makes $125 a month just by giving two hours work each day to his subscription business.

Augustus Van Gieson
of New Jersey
A veteran of many years and another big money-maker.

HERE'S an adventure that you'll enjoy not once, but year after year—*permanently!* It's not an experiment, but a *trip to independence* that's given scores of men like yourself the chance to live—to spend freely, yet save enough to own their own homes; to travel; to give themselves and families all the comforts and little luxuries that make life really worth while.

IF YOU are of the same timber as Minor, Bushnell, Young and Van Gieson, we'll make an opening for you in our sales force. If you can fill a real man's job we'll show you, step by step, how to *monopolize* the subscription business of your community by becoming a Special Representative of *Adventure* and our three other leading magazines. And from the minute you begin, you'll earn

Liberal Commissions and a Regular Monthly Salary

EXPERIENCE, education, where you live does not matter. It's *you* that counts! If you have the ambition, the will to learn and *do*, we'll train you, give you all the secrets of our most successful representatives, show you how to begin, and keep going steadily.

THERE is no obligation. Simply clip the coupon below, and you'll be sent full particulars immediately. You couldn't do a better, more important thing today than

Mail This Coupon Now!

**Manager, Staff Agencies Division,
Box 924, Butterick Building, New York City**

Dear Sir:
Please send me, without obligation, all necessary particulars concerning your practical money-making plan.

Name..

Street..

City.................................... **State**..............................

Adventure
Feb-20-1923
Vol-XXXIX~No.2

Registered in U. S. Patent Office

Published Three Times a Month by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

J. H. GANNON, President
C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York, N. Y.
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.
ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $6.00 in advance
Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents

Foreign postage, $3.00 additional. Canadian Postage, 90 cents.

Trade-Mark Registered; Copyright, 1923, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain. Entered at Stationers' Hall, London, England.

The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

Contents for February 20th, 1923, Issue

Water *A Complete Novelette* . . . . E. S. Pladwell 3
West—the fight for flume rights.

Sea Horror *Pirate Tales from the Law—Blackbeard* . . . . Arthur M. Harris 36
Carolina Colonies—how the law took toll.

The Black Channel *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . Max Bonter 49
Barren Ridge—strange death in a construction camp.

Long Rifles *A Four-Part Story Part I* . . . . . . Hugh Pendexter 69
The Alleghenies—*Black Brond* prepares to scout for Braddock.

Keghead—Outlaw . . . . John Adams Whitehead 100
West—the horse remembers.

The Supercargo . . . . J. D. Newsom 107
South Sea—blackbirders and a zoologist.

Early Counterfeiting *A Bit of Colonial Life* . . . . . Hugh Pendexter 114

When the River Froze . . . . Boyd Fleming 115
U. S.—ice was the best weapon.

Those Pawnee Scouts *A Bit about Indians* . . . . . Edwin L. Sabin 121

Cat-o'-Mountain *A Four-Part Story Conclusion* . . . . Arthur O. Friel 122
The Catskills—"*Snake*" *Sanders* at bay is as dangerous as his slimy pets.

Scalped Men *A Bit of the Old West* . . . . E. L. S. 136

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from preceding page)

Ransom *An Incident in the Affairs of Mohamed Ali* . . . . **George E. Holt** 137
North Africa—the sanest prisoner wins it.

A Death Fight . . . . **William Wells** 140
West—white mettle is as good as red.

A Game in the Bush *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . **Georges Surdez** 143
Ivory Coast—revenge.

The Camp-Fire A free-to-all meeting-place for readers, writers and adventurers 176

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader 185

Ask Adventure 185

Radio 186

Mining and Prospecting 186

Weapons, Past and Present 186

Fishing in North America 186

Mountains and Mountaineering 186

Lost Trails 186

Old Songs That Men Have Sung 191

The Trail Ahead 192

Headings . . . . **Will Crawford**

Cover Design . . . . **James C. McKell**

"SLEEPY" *STEVENS* and his partner, "*Hashknife*" *Hartley*, hadn't been working for the Diamond-S ranch more than ten minutes before they learned about the depredations of the *Black Rider*. They start out to earn the ten thousand dollars in rewards for his capture and run into a welter of bushwacking and express robberies that piles mystery on mystery and gives them the busiest times of their careers. "TRAMPS OF THE RANGE," a novelette of the cow-country by W. C. Tuttle, complete in the next issue.

ACROSS the range the desperadoes trail the prospectors who have rediscovered a famous gold-mine. "THE LOST BLUE BUCKET," a complete novelette by George Bruce Marquis, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure* — the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

Adventure
Feb. 20
1923
Vol. XXXIX
No 2

WATER

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by E. S. Pladwell

Author of "An Agent of Providence," "Sawdust Johnny's Liquor Cure," etc.

FOREWORD

BEFORE the earliest book of the oldest Bible; before the cave man; before the first arboreal ancestor slunk from tree to tree, a tiny streamlet trickled forth from the rocks of a malformed mountain range in an unknown continent.

As the eons passed, bringing glaciers or tropical heat, the land changed form, but the stream persisted. Relentless, irresistible, it sawed its way through the top crust of earth and down through clay, sandstone and even granite till its course became a dark, brooding cañon with sheer walls, beyond the reach of even the flying reptiles which hovered above.

Earthquakes came. Mighty convulsions rocked the walls of the cañon and caused them to fall in. In one case they laid boulders so tightly under the stream that the waters were forced to the surface of the earth again; but the rest of the stream was buried forever.

Landslides and storms brought earth to heal the savage gash which was once the cañon. Winds brought sands to cement the earth. In time not a trace was left of the stream except for the one place where it sparkled in the sunlight amid confused ledges of granite and then dived into the bowels of earth again.

Brown-skinned human beings appeared in the land. Some discovered the pool where it met the sunlight; but in time they passed and left only legend, refreshed every few centuries when some one else happened to find it.

More ages passed. The vanguard of a pushing, inquisitive race broke into this

Copyright, 1923, by the Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain. All rights reserved.

barren land and shouldered the redskins away. They spread into valley and plain. Gradually they came nearer the pool. Two or three of them almost stumbled into the small cañon-valley where the waters met the sunlight; but they took other paths.

And then John Kingman, the desert hobo, turned a corner and came upon it.

I

HE WAS tall and gaunt. His hands and feet were enormous. His face was lean, with high cheek-bones and a humorous twist to the mouth. He owned a checked shirt, a pair of blue overalls with a thousand wrinkles, high miner's boots, a touseled shock of black hair, a canteen, a six-shooter, and nothing else in particular. He was a nobody, a drifting atom in the Great American Desert.

When he found the stream he didn't know what to do about it. He was prospecting for gold. At last it dawned upon him that water in this country was better than gold; so he staked out a claim. Then he started thinking.

Later he wound down through labyrinths of hills, still thinking. He had found a great treasure, but didn't know how to apply it. He thoughtfully crossed a divide and strode down to the rim of a great yellow-brown valley lying stark in the sunlight, a ten-mile oven cursed with a shimmering heat-wave. Folks called it Sundown Valley. It was bare and worthless, without apparent excuse for existence.

Suddenly Kingman stopped.

He had come down-hill all the distance from the pool, now several miles back! Water could be brought down-hill over the same route! A flume could pass the waters into this grim, lonely, dusty, miserable valley and make it an Eden forever!

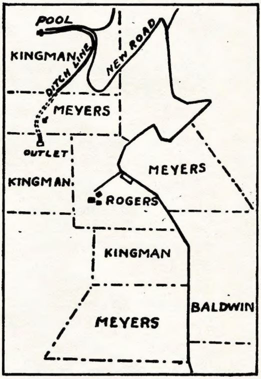
The immensity of the vision paralyzed him. Humbly he saw his own limitations, and wondered if he could make such a magnificent dream come true. The odds were impossible. This was a matter of money. Kingman had none.

Twenty-five miles southward from the end of Sundown Valley was a town. It wasn't much of a town, only a small trade outpost called Wingate; but Kingman made for it. There was a merchant there, one Thomas Cavalier, who looked sensible, solid and honest. That was the man Kingman wanted. He made straight for Cavalier's store.

It was a comfortable place, cool and dark, filled with subdued odors of coffee, cloth, varnish and baked hay. Kingman cornered its owner behind the counter.

The bearded merchant listened. He was a portly man, slow and deliberate, with a massive face and a manner brought westward from his native Virginia.

Sometimes, as Kingman looked along the counter toward a little office at the rear of the store, he could see a feminine face beyond the doorway. It was a dainty head with dark hair, regular features and an aristocratic poise which did not belong in a Western frontier town in 1888; but Kingman was so full of his plan that the girl was hardly noticed.



Kingman's pool was four or five miles west of the road which traversed Sundown Valley and led to the railroad eighty miles away. A branch road could be brought up to the pool to haul materials. A long ditch, running along the rims of the hills, could send water to Sundown Valley. Compared to the result, any cost would be small.

The bearded merchant listened stolidly; but when a road was mentioned he took more interest.

"That must be the watah the Indians have a legend about," mused Cavalier. "I thought it was just some Indian foolishness. If the watah is there, I am surprized some one else has not found it befo' this. It might be right handy. I could have a half-way station at yo' pool."

"Half-way station?"

"I am plannin' to run a line of freight teams to the railroad, suh, to handle my own goods."

Kingman didn't suspect this. All the teaming in the country was done by Dan McClusky, the surly wagon-boss who ran a dozen outfits. Cavalier's plan meant a fight with McClusky. Kingman wanted no fight, but he desired Cavalier's help at any cost.

"Then will you help me to build a flume?" he asked.

"Give me time to think it over."

Kingman gave him time, meanwhile returning to Sundown Valley and laying claim to all the land he could reach. Nobody else wanted it, and land-laws in those days were vague. Kingman could at best stake out only a small portion of the great five-by-ten-mile oval they called Sundown Valley; but if he were going to irrigate that land he wanted a little of the profit.

Returning to town, he found Cavalier willing to help but not sure of the time.

"Conditions are not just right," said the merchant. "I am bearin' heavy burdens already, Mist' Kingman. But meantime we can get ready. Draw on this sto' for provisions and necess'ry materials, but keep the expenses down."

Kingman was fairly satisfied. He sensed that Cavalier had a fight with McClusky on his hands, and possibly other burdens; but Thomas Cavalier was the only man he wanted as patron.

He left Cavalier's store, with its wide porches and cool shade, and strolled along the dusty main street, which boasted a few saloons, a blacksmith shop, some dance-halls, a patched adobe hotel, some corrals, and lines of hitching-racks. He loafed around for the rest of the day and gradually picked up acquaintances. The story of his find began to pass around the town.

The result came before sundown.

A great, hulking figure crossed his path on the street. Kingman looked into the bearded red face and puffy eyes of Dan McClusky, the giant freighter-boss.

"You own that there pool?" asked McClusky.

"Yep."

"I want it."

"Not for sale."

"You better sell!"

"I'm dealin' with Cavalier right now."

"Oh!"

The big freighter turned on his heel and strode away, leaving Kingman vaguely uncomfortable.

Down at the other end of the street was a long, low adobe building with hitching-racks and sacks of grain in front of its board sidewalk. This was the store of Solomon Meyers. Kingman later happened to pass it. The weazened little proprietor, with spectacles and skull-cap, beckoned Kingman over.

"You are der man vot found der vater?" he inquired.

"Yep. I'm Kingman."

The merchant became gracious and unctuous.

"Dot iss a goot find!" he remarked, rubbing his hands. "Maybe you need help. Grub-stake, no? Money, no? Maybe you sell. No?"

"I'm in with Cavalier."

"So-ho!"

The merchant's attitude changed somewhat.

"Vell, mine goot friend, maybe I can do better."

"I think not. Thanks just the same."

Kingman had heard of Meyers, so he got away quickly; but he sensed he had put his foot into something when he found that pool. Everybody wanted to get into it!

"I'm darned popular all of a sudden!" he remarked to himself.

Next day came another offer. Solemn Dick Childs, the suave gambler who looked like the villain of old-time melodrama, accosted him in front of the Childs dance-hall and sin-palace. The slim, mustached card expert with the sad face wanted to buy into the pool or make an alliance with its owner. Kingman backed away.

"It's not for sale," he said.

"All right. Mebbe you'll come around later."

And the gambler turned away indifferently.

Kingman now realized that many forces were reaching out for his pool. He felt somewhat alarmed, but this feeling was drowned by a feeling of importance. The lone desert wanderer from nowhere had assumed a certain eminence in the town. It was gratifying. It might have gone to his head; but next evening he chanced to come upon a knot of men talking in a saloon. One of them bore down on him, grinning broadly.

"Heard the news?"

"No," said Kingman.

"I understand some feller's jumped your water claim!"

II

KINGMAN speeded back on a borrowed horse to his mountains. Quickly he made the twenty-five miles into Sundown Valley and swung up into the hills and cañons to the northwest, toward his pool.

As he rode along, sometimes in full sight of the valley and sometimes hidden from it by hill-slopes, he noticed dust arising from a deep, purplish cañon three or four miles to the eastward. That meant a wagon in a pass, where the road swung up out of the valley. The wagon was apparently about to start down the long slope.

At length the outfit emerged from the sheltering walls of the cañon. Kingman saw it clearly. It was one of Dan McClusky's freight-wagons, a long platform on wheels with a trailer coming along behind. It seemed to be traveling light, with a lone driver. The canvas tarpaulin which covered its freight was tied low.

The air, in spite of the heat-wave, was so clear that Kingman could see every detail. The driver was smoking. He held a slack line on his twelve horses. A booted foot was getting ready to apply the brake as the wagon went past a clump of greenish sage-brush.

Suddenly a cloud of dust arose from a knoll just beyond the road. A troop of half-clad Indians swirled around the corner of the knoll and launched themselves on the freight-wagons. Kingman reined in his horse and watched. He was too far away to help the freighter. He had to look on.

The next play was new.

The driver was almost surrounded by hostile Indians. They were dashing upon him from all sides. He had but one lone rifle against fifty. It was time to crouch low in his wagon and sell his life dearly. But he didn't.

The driver calmly stopped his team, climbed down from the seat, walked up to the leading horse, unhooked its traces, climbed upon the animal as the Indians swirled by, and started on a jog-trot toward town.

"Well, I'm darned!" said Kingman.

He didn't know that there were any Indians on the war-path. The whole business looked fishy. The redskins were not after the teamster anyhow. They swept the cargo off the wagons and vanished, leaving horses and wagons as they were. The cargo was awkward for mounted men to carry. It consisted mainly of small, round kegs.

"Some tribe's goin' to enjoy a high old time!" grunted Kingman. "I wonder what'll be the end of it?"

But he had his own troubles, and as the Indians vanished up the distant cañon and traveled away, Kingman forgot the episode and went onward.

He worked further up-hill into the broken country. At last he came to the great ledge of flat rocks in the little yellow-gray valley where the air was humid, advertising the presence of water. He dismounted and started across the ledge toward the mossy center, looking for a trace of the claim-jumper but seeing nobody.

Suddenly a strange voice echoed among the rocks—

"Git back!"

Kingman halted. A rifle-barrel arose from behind a rock on the other side of the pool. A brown hat slowly lifted over the top, and then a sunburned, red-bearded face with a bulbous nose and a mean expression.

"What's this?" demanded Kingman.

"You know durned well what it is!"

"Didn't you see my location notice?"

"Yeh. You made out a minin'-claim. This is water!"

"My claim goes!"

"Does it? Heh!"

Kingman had been wondering where he had seen that face before. At last he placed it. The fellow was one of the tough gang which obeyed the orders of Dan McClusky.

They were a hard crowd. The old-time Western freighter was made of iron, whip-cord and gall. McClusky had collected a gang which ranged from dangerous gunmen to petty larceny rascals. The specimen facing Kingman was one of the second-raters, not good enough to handle big teams but useful for dirty work.

Kingman wasted no further words on this man. He backed toward the distant edge of the rock ledge, intending to have it out from some position where the odds were not all with the other fellow. He came to a fracture in the ledge, where he had to turn slightly and watch his step.

Something crashed into his left shoulder, under the armpit. The sledge-hammer kick hurled him forward upon the rocks. A loud explosion tingled in his ears.

The assassin hadn't dared to face Kingman. He had waited!

The prospector writhed on the rock. He was numb from the shock of the bullet. He twisted around and freed his right arm, then desperately pulled out his six-shooter and swung its muzzle in the other man's general direction.

Gathering himself together, he looked about. The other man was out of sight. A depression in the ledge hid Kingman from his rifle. Otherwise there might have been another shot!

Kingman felt a moist red stream welling from his shoulder. He tore his shirt into strips and made a rude tourniquet. It had to be done; the blood was gushing from the wound; but it was fiendish hard work. The sun was scorching; the rocks were hot; he dared not move his body freely, and the job had to be done with one hand. It took a long time.

Kingman then started crawling backward toward the edge of the rock ledge. He planned to retreat, circle around the whole cairn of rocks, and then meet his enemy face to face. Inch by inch, minute by minute, he slipped over the hot stone.

At last he came to a high point within easy sight of the enemy. Kingman had to chance it. There was no other way. But the other man made no sign!

He wasn't there any more! He had gone somewhere else! Kingman, wounded, was in for a desperate game of hide-and-seek against an enemy better able to move!

The gaunt prospector considered. He lay still for a long time with every sense alert. He saw that his movements must be very cautious. Otherwise he and his dream for Sundown Valley were gone forever!

Finally a faint, shuffling noise just below the edge of the rock came to his ears. The wounded man's body tensed. It meant that the other was making a circuitous approach upon the place where Kingman had fallen! The prospector had consumed much time after being shot. The other had grown impatient, but not impatient enough to stand up and walk to the fallen man. He wanted to slip around, view the scene from another angle, and make sure Kingman was dead.

Slowly, quietly, carefully, his head came up over the rock ledge. He looked straight into the black muzzle of Kingman's six-shooter.

Five minutes later the gaunt prospector staggered away from the pool, alone.

III

KINGMAN came to consciousness in a white bed under the low ceiling of a cool, dark little room in an adobe house, with the moon-faced town doctor bending over him.

He didn't know how he got there. From a jumble of disconnected impressions he remembered that his horse had left the pool, scared by the shots, causing him to stagger over hot and tortuous country toward the distant road.

He remembered garish scenes during his passage—a hot cañon of bluish rock, a clump of thorny mesquite, a blistering red gulch where rattlers whirred at him, a stark gray hillside that he couldn't climb, and a dusty yellow valley where emerald lizards stared and talked about him; but the rest was delirium.

He had reached the road. A Chinaman driving a four-horse team had picked him up. The Chinaman was a worse driver than usual, and his horses promptly ran away. Hours later they clattered into town with ears back and lather all over their quivering bodies. They saved Kingman's life. A half-hour later and he would have bled to death.

He recovered quickly. The doctor spliced a torn artery, and Maryland Cavalier came in daily to read to the patient, a kindness which was appreciated. The quiet, low-voiced girl from Virginia rather welcomed the little task. It relieved the monotony of life in this bare little border town.

Some days later, when nearly recovered,

Kingman happened to meet Dan McClusky on the street. The big freighter-boss was carrying a bull-whip, but Kingman felt that a few words of explanation were necessary.

"Who was that man of yours who tried to jump my claim?" he demanded.

"Him? Tim Marrish. Why?"

"I was wonderin' if you sent him."

"Are you lookin' for trouble?"

"No. That's why I'm curious to know if you'll send any more men up there."

"Send 'em? Huh! I don't care a hoot whether they go up there or not!"

"Then maybe I'll have to take measures to stop 'em."

"That's your lookout."

Kingman was baffled. The aggressive wagon-boss didn't seem to care for anybody or anything. His arrogance went the limit. Kingman felt an itch to fight but knew he was too weak.

"Your men do funny things," he remarked as a parting shot. "One of 'em got jumped by Injuns up in Sundown Valley."

"Oh that. The town marshal knows all about it."

"Does he know your skinner got on a horse and rode through the whole tribe?"

McClusky's sardonic eyes were cold now.

"Some day you'll see too durned much, young feller. Then you'll git into trouble. You better go to bed again. You've got a fever."

And the wagon-boss turned away.

Next day Kingman witnessed the departure of Thomas Cavalier's freight team. He stood under the shade of the great overhanging store porch while the new outfit, with jingling bells on the lead animals, rumbled down the dusty street on its way to the distant railroad. The great wagon, whose wheels were almost as tall as a man, was followed by the usual trailer and preceded by fourteen sturdy black and gray mules. As the outfit swayed along over the heads of the crowd, Kingman noticed audible comments on both sides of him.

"There goes trouble!" remarked a pessimist. "Cavalier can't buck McClusky!"

"As how?" asked a neighbor.

"D'ye think Big Dan'll let a rival line run loose in this country?"

"He's durned well got to!" roared a third voice. "If he starts anything, he'll have half the town on his head!"

In the sweaty, unkempt crowd of miners and townsmen, with varicolored shirts, tousled beards, well-kept guns, and boots which showed the dust of many desert miles, there was a dangerous undercurrent of feeling which kept lurking near the surface. It seemed to run through the whole town like a somber heritage from the past. Kingman didn't know the reasons for it. Later he asked Cavalier about it, and the merchant explained:

"I have tried to keep the peace; but I am compelled at last, suh, to take things into my own hands. There is considerable trade rivalry here, Mist' Kingman. My goods have been delayed or broken so often that I am convinced that this freighter pusson is deliberat'ly playin' into the hands of another merchant, Mist' Meyers!"

Kingman saw that his alliance with Cavalier drew him into this other fight. The town was divided, and Kingman could not be neutral and still work for his Sundown Valley project. He accepted the rôle of partisan. Gratitude alone demanded it. While he was in bed Cavalier had sent some men to guard his pool for him.

Feeling well enough to ride again, Kingman set out for the valley next day, planning to make a rule-of-thumb survey and gather cost-estimates for the future.

But when he got to Sundown he noticed that there were more folks present than before. Once he sighted two or three men raising a great cloud of yellowish dust in the distance. Later, when climbing the rim of the hills, he noticed a couple of men above him and a mile or so to the southward. He caught the tracks of still another pair across his path.

Vaguely alarmed, he turned through some of the tortuous country and reached the wall of a steep and dusty hill. He heard the thump of hoofs ahead, and stopped. Around the corner came a mustached fellow riding a buckskin pony. It was one of Cavalier's men. He sighted Kingman and pulled his horse back on its haunches.

"Heard the news?" he asked.

"What?"

"Solomon Meyers has grabbed a lot o' land you forgot to take up. We just heard about it."

"Well, what of it?"

The rider bit off a chew of tobacco thoughtfully.

"I heerd you was plannin' to run a flume along the curve of the hills and down into the valley."

"Yep."

"Did you grab all the land along the line of your flume?"

"No. I couldn't. It's three-four mile long."

"Yeh. That's the trouble. Meyers has blocked you. He's spiteful against Cavalier, that's why. His men took up land straddlin' your right-of-way."

The thing hit Kingman like a club. It was his own oversight—a fool blunder caused by his gadding about hither and yon when he staked out his claims to the land. He had picked choice pieces, intending to take up other patches when he had time. Now he realized that he should have hung to his ditch-line till every inch was owned!

Cursing himself, he turned his horse silently and started back. In a short time he found where the damage was done. Right in the middle of a barren shelf leading toward the valley, a saddle or depression between two hills, he found a location-monument which he had not discerned because of boulders when coming in the other direction. The saddle was the only possible course of the water into the valley!

On top of the nearest hill, to the left, a man with rifle was seated on a rock, smoking a pipe. He was Meyers' guard! Kingman was checkmated.

IV

THE blistering Summer ended with no change in the affairs of John Kingman. A cool Autumn and a cooler Winter passed without any realization of his plans except for some surveys. The crafty Solomon Meyers had stopped him in his tracks.

Kingman wanted to fight. He wanted to jam his project through, over Meyers' lands or any one else's; but the sensible Cavalier forbade it. He feared it might start a battle which would rip the town apart, and he carried enough troubles already.

But though Kingman's main plan was made to wait, the long road to the railroad was switched through the hills and past the pool. A shanty arose alongside the waters. A shed and a hay corral were erected among the rocks. Soon there were water troughs, pumps, harness-racks and wagons where once was only a lonely cañon.

Some time after the detour was made, a shamefaced McClusky driver rumbled in with his wagons and sought water. It was given. Thereafter McCluskey's freighters made Kingman's Wells a regular port of call. The old road was abandoned.

Back in town, Cavalier, McCluskey, Meyers and Gambler Childs attended strictly to business. Feeling seemed to die down. Freight teams came and went without interruption except from occasional stray Indians far out in the valleys and sand-washes.

The Indians gave some folks concern. A mustached fellow in store clothes appeared, and after a time folks dubbed him "That Mysterious Gent" and let it go at that. Kingman met him one afternoon at a bar. The Mysterious Gent had imbibed. He wanted to talk about Indians.

"There's darned fools runnin' the res'vation," he remarked. "Some day Injuns'll get mad and sail in here. Mop this town all over the prairie. Yes, sir!"

Cavalry detachments had taken the starch out of the Indians long before. The dirty, ragged, moth-eaten crowd at the distant reservation hadn't impressed Kingman.

"They haven't got a fight left in 'em!" he snorted. "They're half-starved!"

"Mebbe that's why they'll fight. Half-starved. Fellers cheat 'em on Gov'ment rations. Sell 'em liquor and work 'em up. I know all about it."

Big Dan McClusky had been standing in the outskirts of the crowd. Now he elbowed in.

"Wadda you know about it?" he inquired.

" 'Nuff. Oughta put everybody in jail. Injun agent's crooked. Liquor-sellers crooked. Freighters crooked. Injuns crooked themselves. Everybody's crooked."

"Who are you?" demanded Big Dan.

"Nemmine. I know. Me, I've invest'gated. Old Injun chief died last Summer. Who's new chief? Lobo. You know Lobo? Crooked! Little, no-good, drunken ——! Kill you in a minute. Hates white man. Hates himself. Hates everybody. Talks to tribe all time. Tribe hungry. Full of whisky. White man blind! Freighters more blind than anybody. Sell

Injuns whisky. Bimeby Injuns start to make trouble. Too much agent, freighters and whisky!

"You lie!" roared Big Dan.

The drunken man steadied himself against the bar and tried to focus his insulted attention on the freighter-boss.

"Not me. You!" he countered.

McClusky's enormous hand slammed down on his shoulder, driving the wabbly man to the floor as if a pile-driver had struck him. McClusky reached down and shook him till his teeth rattled.

A black-clad arm reached out and interrupted Big Dan. Solemn Dick Childs, the gambler, looked into the freighter's bearded face.

"Let him alone!" said Childs.

"I'll 'tend to this!" thundered the big freighter.

"Let him alone!"

The men faced each other. It was an impasse. Neither could back out gracefully, and both were wicked fighters with fist or gun. The more nervous folks in the crowd began to edge away.

Childs whipped out a derringer before the slower McClusky could do anything. The freighter's hands slowly elevated. In his eyes were amazement, insult and baffled rage; but Childs calmly stripped his gun away and laid it on the bar.

"I told you to let him alone," reminded Childs. "Now you can get out of here!"

Glowering wrathfully, McClusky started to back away while the gambler stood at ease, holding his dangerous little pistol, master of the situation.

There was a sudden thud. Childs' legs crumpled under him. He slumped to the floor. A hulking McClusky man behind him had smashed a beer-bottle on his head.

In an instant there was tumult. From out of a mass of moving bodies, tossing arms and craning necks came the roar of voices. But these subsided. Five men with drawn six-shooters stood alongside Big Dan, members of his own notorious gang. The crowd was silenced, McClusky booted the prone gambler, gave a slight nod to his crowd and made for the door. His men walked sidewise and kept watch.

"Some more o' Dan McClusky's didoes!" snorted a man alongside Kingman. "This vere town'll stand for that feller about so long!"

Kingman didn't pay any attention. He didn't care about these town fights, for he didn't realize their import to him. He was interested only in his pool. He soon went back to it.

Three days later he received an unexpected visitor. It was Solomon Meyers, riding a gentle bay and looking like a shriveled monkey in the big saddle. He was accompanied by an employee.

Kingman was dumfounded. His first thought was resentment. His second was curiosity. The latter won. Meyers made himself sociable, chatting shrewdly about the weather, the water, the town and everything else. Kingman grew impatient.

"What to you want here?" he demanded.

"Ah! Now you vish to talk pizness. I did not come for pizness. I came to ride. To look at der country. No?"

"No," said Kingman.

"I like to see der country grow. Some day we will have seddlers—farmers und ranchers. It will be good pizness to have dem in der valley."

"Well, if you're so darned anxious to have water in the valley, what in thunder are you blockin' it for?"

"It is pizness."

"Yeh. Your kind."

The withered little merchant laid a hand on Kingman's shoulder.

"It wass too big a brobosition to leave me oud," he defended. "I did not want Cavalier to own der valley und get all der trade here some day. I look ahead. Now you must come to me. You can not build der ditch withoud me. Can you blame me?"

"What's your proposition?"

"If you put Cavalier oud of it I can let you pass on my land."

Kingman doubled up his enormous fist. Meyers waved with his hands.

"No! No! No! It iss foolish! It gets noding! Suppose you fight und lick me. Does it help bring vater to der valley below? No, no, mine friend. I still have der land across your ditch line. But why should we fight? Does it help me? Does it help you? No! I come to bring peace."

Kingman knew the little gargoyle held all the trumps and was playing with him.

"Go on," invited Kingman.

"I tell you. Come with me. Get your horse. Come."

The wondering Kingman was curious and dumbly allowed Meyers to lead him through tumbled hills clear to the edge of

Sundown Valley, where they halted and dismounted.

Below them spread the great drab valley with its bare floor, its sage or greasewood brush on the side hills, and its funereal mountains rising like stark ramparts along its northern end. The valley was grayish, reflecting the dull colors of the Wintry sky. Meyers waved his hand to take it all in.

"I own some of it. You own more of it. We can be rich. I sold some land to seddlers already."

The effrontery of Meyers' real-estate deal in this forsaken land made Kingman gasp.

"I promise der seddlers we will have water soon," finished the calm merchant.

"The water will come when I let it!" snapped Kingman.

"Fighting! Always you think of fighting! Why? Why? Do you not see der other way? Look below in der valley. You see just dirt, no? Look again. Change your eye. See it as it should be. You look on green fields, no? You see roads. Houses. Hay-stacks. Barns. Fruit-orchards. Vines. Green—all green!"

"You devil!" snarled Kingman, aghast at this sacrilege of his own visions.

"Devil to think of that? No! Get rid of Cavalier und you can have it!"

"You devil! You —— little sneakin', sneerin' ——! You toss my own ideas back in my face! You come into my country just to spoil it! Just to turn it into a dollar-makin' scheme! I'd like to——"

Words failed him. He swung a wrathful fist but pulled the blow. The weazened little merchant was so bent and non-resisting that the big fellow had to drop his hands and take it out in profanity. He made the air lurid, tracing Meyers' ancestry with crude directness to the original molecule or plasm, then swinging it through various mongrel forms till it got to Meyers. Meyers merely looked reproachful.

"Fight!" he sighed. "Always fight! Oh, well! You do not feel good today. I will leave you. Some day I come back when you feel better."

And the wily little merchant turned his back and drifted away, leaving Kingman to sizzle in his own wrath.

The prospector mentioned the matter to Thomas Cavalier later when back in town. The stout merchant looked a little weary.

"There always seems to be rascals at work!" he remarked.

"Mebbe I can help you thin 'em out."

"No. Not that, Mist' Kingman. The town has had enough brawls. Let these people alone. Some day things will change."

One change came quickly, but not to Cavalier's liking.

Next morning as he ambled from his near-by house to open up the store he found his gangling clerk running excitedly along the board-walk from town. Sighting Cavalier he waved an alarmed hand.

"Your wagon was held up in Sundown Valley! Kelly, the teamster, was shot! The wagon was looted! The team's scattered all over the valley! Travelers brought in the news just now!"

Cavalier's jaw set. It was an item in this dirty trade war that was beginning to lay its heavy curse on the district. It was an attack, a loss and an affront. Then another somber thought struck him.

"Five thousand dollars in gold went with the teamster! I'd sent it out to pay for new goods! If that money's gone for good, then I'm mighty nigh busted!"

V

WHEN the real import of the Sundown Valley holdup trickled through town Cavalier's friends rushed to his side, filling his store with tobacco-smoke and sympathy. Parties went out to the scene of the holdup. The body of the slain teamster was brought back to town for a well-attended funeral.

Everybody knew that Cavalier was hard hit, and none better than Solomon Meyers, who offered suave condolences and rubbed his hands. Big Dan McClusky merely looked sarcastic. Cavalier paid them no attention.

A posse started out with a great clatter and rambled around the hills. There were few clews to the robbers. Alongside the abandoned wagon were a few horse-tracks, but that was all.

The wagon stood alongside the road, with its trailer. The driver had camped there for the night. The remains of his little fire still blackened the ground near a clump of sage. He had been murdered long before dawn, shot down by an assassin who had sneaked up on him.

In the tumult that followed the arrival of the news came rumors that Dan McClusky had a ferocious row with one or two of his own men; but this was a minor matter. He had beaten his men before.

John Kingman watched all the excitement. He knew the news was trickling into the hills and byways outside, where friends of Cavalier were scattered; and if these men decided to come in and help their friend and grub-staker, Kingman feared for the peace of the town.

Some folks talked about Indians. It was rumored that several sassy little parties of redskins had been sighted and old-timers opined that these swooped down on the lonely wagon. Kingman hardly believed it.

He found himself at the head of Cavalier's crowd. A certain leadership had been forced upon him because of his alliance with the merchant, and he felt he must do something. The town marshal was a nobody. Cavalier was slow to move. Kingman gathered a little crowd and started for his own investigation into the Sundown Valley affair.

He took to saddle at noon of a cold and blustery day. He arrived in the valley in two hours. The robbers left but few trails running from the wagon, as the wind-blown dust obliterated the hoof-prints. Night found Kingman at his pool, with all traces lost. The last faint bits of evidence, however, pointed toward the hills at the west of the valley, so next morning Kingman started westward.

They traveled into a pass and then into higher country where a long valley stretched upward to distant hills. They went into the hills and soon came to timber. They first passed a straggling grove of parched trees and gradually plunged into a small forest of real pines as they swung toward the south.

This was not desert country. They had climbed up into the cooler and rarer atmospheres where the chill winds had a new snap and tang. The ground under their feet ceased to be mere dry dirt but became a carpet of manzanita leaves and pine-needles. Little streams began to appear, and a spring or two in the fissures of giant rocks.

At noon the party halted. A short, bearded man questioned the advisability of proceeding.

"You may be right," surmised Kingman. "Still, the tracks ran this way. If we circle far enough around, we'll get 'em."

But there were no tracks. When the party approached the bare southern boundary of Sundown Valley again, after traversing a great half-circle, the bearded man seemed vindicated. As a leader, Kingman's stock went down.

"You see?" said the bearded man.

"Yep. I see. Now I'm goin' back!"

"What for?"

"If we didn't cross them fellers' tracks when we circled around, it means they're still within the circle! I'm goin' back!"

Such steadfast purpose wasn't expected, and some of the men balked. There was an argument. Kingman finally started back with two tough prospectors.

Later, as the setting sun threw its subdued rays in their faces, the trio climbed up along the side of a high hill just below the timbered mountains. The land was practically unexplored, and great vistas of wilderness lay below them. Looking cautiously from their wind-swept eminence, they discerned a wisp of smoke curling from a clump of mesquite near the center of a broad, timbered gulch below to the westward. It was a tiny, furtive wisp, hardly more than a faint haze.

"I reckon we'll look into it," decided Kingman. "White men in this country are scarce!"

Half an hour later the prospector and his two followers slipped around some mesquite brush behind the mysterious campers, where they listened and learned much. The campers' talk convicted them. Their voices arose in frank discussion of their recent travels from the Cavalier wagon.

Suddenly the listening trio burst from the brush and confronted two rough-looking men drinking coffee from tin cups. The cups clattered to the ground. The drinkers looked into the muzzles of forty-fives. Their grimy hands went skyward.

"Tie 'em!" commanded Kingman to his companions.

"Aw, what's the matter with you?" growled one of the prisoners. "What's the idee anyhow? Who be ye? Holdup men?"

"Yep. We want that sack of gold dust you've got!"

The prisoners eyed each other, but Kingman knew too much.

Further, he knew who the men were. They were a pair of Dan McClusky's freighters.

It wasn't an easy job to get the gold dust away from these citizens. They had to be thrown to the ground and stripped to their money-belts; but Cavalier's gold was finally produced, all of it, and the return-trip to town began.

The journey was long but triumphant. Lanky John Kingman led his little cavalcade through the main street next morning while loungers crowded out of saloons and dance-halls to look. Maryland Cavalier witnessed the procession from the shade of her father's store porch, and Kingman made full note of it.

It was the first time he had ever received more than a passing glance or a courteous word from this cool young aristocrat since she had ministered to him when ill, and that was mere charity which any good woman would give to a sick man. But now he was returning in triumph. He felt quite a hero.

The surly prisoners were turned over to the embarrassed town marshal, who fingered his white whiskers and at last condescended to put them in the official calaboose, a thick-walled shed standing amid tin cans at the edge of town. The calaboose was old, with whitewash peeling off its exterior. It had one room, one door and one window with rusty bars. Its construction was the most solid in the town, but its state of repair was horrible. Folks didn't get arrested very often in this town. Things generally happened too suddenly for that!

"I don't know what to do with these two fellers," complained the town marshal querulously. "Now I've got to feed 'em and watch this jail all night!"

Kingman was about to make a tart retort, but a friend nudged him.

"Come away!" grunted the friend. "The marshal's a McClusky man. We'll have to watch this jail ourselves!"

They did so. Kingman returned the stolen gold to Cavalier and was soon back with his friends, gathered around the calaboose. Passers-by noticed the cluster of men and joined them. Soon there was a large crowd loafing around, talking in groups, and they were not all Cavalier men by any means.

The Cavalier crowd mostly centered around Kingman, who had now acquired a big reputation which he wasn't sure he wanted. He was rated as a grim and earnest fighter in a town where there was plenty of competition in that line. Hadn't he killed a fellow at his pool? Hadn't he captured these two prisoners? He had. It was an awkward reputation, but Kingman had to accept it.

The afternoon wore away. The sun set. The prisoners, who had launched solid barrages of vituperation through the jail bars, received a bucket of stew and settled down to dinner. The crowd of townsmen grew smaller. Waning daylight made the figures less easy to recognize.

Suddenly there was a clatter of hoofs around the corner. Five horsemen turned into view. They galloped into the clearing in front of the whitewashed calaboose, with Big Dan McClusky leading them.

The newcomers dismounted, and McClusky stalked toward the door of the little jail. He had just arrived in town and learned of this outrage against his underlings, so he was not in a genial mood.

He wasted no words. While his armed ruffians faced about and watched the crowd, he leaned his enormous shoulders against the door and tried to push it in. It didn't budge.

There were titters among the spectators, but not from John Kingman.

"Hey!" he yelled. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Shut up!" snapped McClusky. "Mind yer own business!"

The big teamster leaned heavily against the door again. Kingman started forward. Hairy arms wound around his neck.

"Be still!" hissed a voice in his ear. "Let him alone!"

"But——"

"Want to start a gun fight here, in this crowd? Them fellers with Big Dan are some o' the wust rapscallions in the country! Let him alone! Wait a while!"

"Where's the town marshal?"

"Him? Shucks! I guess he ain't aimin' to ruin his health by hangin' around in this sort of a crowd!"

The hulking McClusky had moved around to the barred window of the jail. He grasped a bar in mighty hands. He braced a knee against the whitewashed wall. He tugged.

The bar came out. Big Dan sprawled backward to the ground.

Guffaws of laughter assailed his ears. He jumped to his feet angrily and faced the crowd.

"Laugh, you ——!" he roared. "Laugh while I take yer —— rotten jail apart! Here!'

Big Dan drew back his arm and hurled the heavy iron bar toward Kingman, who ducked. The bar whizzed over his head and slammed into a fence.

McClusky wrenched a second bar out of its socket.

"Take this!" he snarled. "Get to —— out of here before I bust you with the whole —— calaboose!"

Whiz-z-z-z went a bar into the crowd. Men began to scatter. A third bar was pulled out of place and hurled. It hit a man on the thigh. There was a yelp of pain, drowned by the general laughter.

"Come on!" challenged Big Dan, while the dark forms of his two imprisoned minions started out through the window. "Come on, any five of you! You'll stick my men in jail, will you? Huh! I'm runnin' my men! If there's any discipline to be done, I'll do it! Git that? I'll do it! You fellers let my men alone!"

The big brute, with his arrogant independence, seemed to have the crowd paralyzed. Standing among the dark figures of his men, he loomed like a formidable bulwark which nobody cared to tackle. He gave them plenty of time; then he advanced.

"Gangway! Make room for my men! Go on—spread apart!"

The crowd gave way. The giant and his small mob strode through the townsfolk and down the street. The friends of Cavalier stood around and watched every move but said nothing. Later they examined the jail and the sockets where the bars had been.

There was nothing miraculous about McClusky's feat. The bars were bedded in old putty and cracked cement. An ordinary man might have trouble in moving them, but the powerful McClusky found it easy.

Kingman had seen enough. Somewhat disgusted, he left the crowd and went to bed soon afterward. To his idea the townsmen had taken McClusky's actions a little too mildly.

Next morning Kingman woke late and sauntered forth to his usual breakfast in the Chinese restaurant. The Chinaman seemed subdued, and the few patrons mumbled in low voices. There seemed to be something ominous in the air.

Later the puzzled Kingman went into the street, passing loungers who seemed to be excited and alarmed. He kept down the street till he came to the end. Then he looked around a corner and understood.

Dangling from one of the town's few trees were the two robbers. They had been quietly taken away from McClusky and lynched during the night.

VI

IN THE midst of strife, turmoil, spite and grief there is always progress somewhere, and John Kingman furnished it for the town of Wingate and for Sundown Valley. He secured all the financial aid that the worried Cavalier could lend him and started work on his flume.

He ran a crude but effective survey along his ditch-line, skipping the land owned by Meyers. He brought lumber and cement into the hills. He stored dynamite up the cañon beyond the pool, and used it where rock impeded him. He employed horse and plow on the softer soil, digging a trench four feet deep and five feet wide. In time he built nearly a mile of ditch.

It was a stately task. Kingman had not realized the cost in time, money and labor; yet when he looked down upon the arid oval of Sundown Valley he knew that the job was a righteous one and should be done. Some of those lands down below were his. They meant riches. Other lands were not his, but he held the key to the waters.

As the Winter progressed he passed around the Meyers property and began work on the interrupted stretch of ditch-line on his own land nearer to Sundown Valley. Here the hills were more open and less rocky. He hired a helper and another plow.

A house was built. It was just a crude tent-shed at the top of a gray hill-slope. Lumber was drawn to the base of the hills and taken up to the site by pack-mules. A two-room affair was finally knocked together near the edge of the Meyers line. It was calculated to house several men if necessary.

Money became short. Cavalier had larger expenses now. Extra men traveled with his wagons. Watchmen guarded his store. But Kingman took what meager help he could and kept working.

Meyers also kept busy. The shrewd little trader hypnotized two settlers into buying land in Sundown Valley, so the hopeful investors came with their teams, bedding, furniture and families, camping on their ground like Gipsies.

One camp was just below Kingman's place and the other far out in the flat. Each settler had parked his worldly goods in a hollow square, with crawling, squalling children all over the place.

Kingman visited the nearest outfit, picking his way amid packing-boxes, stoves, bureaus, blankets and babies, and made the acquaintance of the hardy immigrant who led his little mob into this dry wilderness and seemed to be happy about it.

His name was Tom Rogers. He came from Indiana and had a cheery face, a handsome long beard, seven children and a lot of faith.

"Yessir," he remarked, "I reckon this here's goin' to be the best ranch in the country. Came right across the plains and landed this place first shot! I'm lucky! Soon as the water comes down I'll make things hum. Yes, sir! Got it all figgered out. Pear-orchard over there. Plums yonder. Alfalfa-field down in the flat. House here. Garden truck in front of it. I'll make folks set up and take notice!"

Kingman envied the man's fresh optimism.

"When did Meyers say the water would come?" he questioned.

"Right soon. He says things is pretty near fixed."

"Oh."

A large, husky blond girl with a comely face but worn calico clothes and frayed shoes pushed to the front.

"Are you connected with that there ditch?" she demanded.

"Yes, ma'am, somewhat."

"Well, you better get a move on up there. We want that water! The quicker the better!"

"Sho, Molly!" chided her father. "Talk more sociable!"

"Sociable! We haven't got money enough to be sociable around here very long without water, and you know it!"

"Molly!"

"I don't care! What does this man Meyers mean by takin' our money and dumpin' us out in the middle of nowhere? Out here in this no-'count, mis'able, worthless passel of rattlesnake land? How do you know it's not all a swindle? Tell me the truth, mister: Is there water up above?"

"There is," admitted Kingman.

"Humph! Probably just a trickle, I suppose! Well, mister, you go back to your ditch and make her flow! We want action!"

She was a splendid, husky Amazon; and her rolled sleeves showed an arm that would do credit to a truck-driver. Her face was round, her eyes were blue, her hair was done up in a gold-brown mop and her voice had the aggressive clearness of a bugle.

Kingman went back to his ditch.

Back in town conditions were unsettled. Just now McClusky was on the rampage. On the night he had saved his two men from the jail, a horde of armed persons invaded his corral, covered him with a gun and led the robbers to the hanging-tree.

McClusky felt affronted. He was high, low and middle court for his men, and he loudly resented this insult to his authority. He stormed around and thirsted for vengeance, but he couldn't find who did it.

Kingman learned all this from the Mysterious Gent, who drifted in from the back hills like a ghost from nowhere and made himself comfortable in the Kingman shanty. The newcomer had lots of news.

"Dan McClusky started beatin' up some of his own crowd. They had a free-for-all in Dan's corral. He won.

"Johnny Whittaker, the bartender, died night before last. Rattlesnake bite. The bite wasn't so bad, but Johnny got excited and filled up on the stuff he sells over the bar.

"Two new troops of cavalry just went up to the Army post. More comin' later. The Injuns is gettin' restless over at the reservation. I'm watchin' for somethin' to happen."

Indians didn't interest Kingman much. He hadn't seen any of the moth-eaten tribe for half a year; but next morning he was given a surprize.

It happened on the flat lands at the south end of Sundown Valley, far away from Kingman's land. His attention was attracted to a cloud of dust and a body of moving persons on horseback. He sought his field-glasses.

Five Indians were racing across the valley toward the western hills. There was no apparent need for haste, yet they streaked across the yellow-brown lands madly, flogging their ponies.

Ten minutes later a larger mob of about twenty redskins appeared through a pass between low hills and dashed into the flat after the others. Their actions toward their fleeing brethren were hostile.

One of the new arrivals halted his brown-white pinto pony and took aim with a rifle, straight at the other crowd. His bullet only made them go faster. Soon both parties had raced across the valley and hidden from sight in the hills.

"It's started!" exclaimed the Mysterious Gent. "Just like I expected!"

"What's started?"

"Trouble. They're fightin' each other. Pretty soon they'll be after white folks!"

"What's it all about?"

"Whisky. Some months ago a crowd of 'em swooped down on a wagon. Grabbed enough to keep the whole tribe pickled for a month. The Injun agent didn't know nothin' about it till too late.

"Well, last week another wagon was raided up in the hills somewhere. This time the raiders didn't divvy with the rest of the tribe. Hogged it all. The other ones got mad. That's what they're fightin' about. Savvy?"

"Whose wagon did they hold up?" asked Kingman.

"McClusky's."

"Did the driver get away?"

"Yep."

Kingman began to see the whole business. McClusky wasn't selling liquor to the Indians. Far from it! His teams were merely put in a good place to get held up! The Indians could give McClusky some "presents" later!

It was a beautiful scheme. Even the most rigid Government official could not accuse McClusky of trading in liquor to the Indians!

Kingman looked at the Mysterious Gent thoughtfully.

"Who are you?" he blurted.

"Me? Oh, I'm jest an old-time Army scout. The Army folks sent me out to see what's gittin' into this fool tribe of Injuns. If I report that they're out of control, then we'll see some ructions around here!"

VII

FOR an aristocratic young girl educated in a high-toned Eastern seminary, a rough little Arizona shanty town in 1888 meant ugliness, monotony and disillusion. Maryland Cavalier stood the place only because her father was here.

It was no place for a young girl of this type. The men were a rough, rowdy lot, fit to wring a living out of a cruel and somber land. Their manners were abrupt and their ways boisterous. As for the women—well, they are all dead now anyhow.

Thomas Cavalier realized his daughter's loneliness fully. He implored that she leave him, but she wouldn't.

For years she had been away from him, since the bygone day when he had left his motherless girl in the old home town and started West to recoup a fortune shattered by the Civil War. Now she intended to stand by him. Secretly he was pleased; but he sensed the price she was paying.

In one way, Maryland was seeing more of real life than she had ever dreamed of in her existence. From her aloof position in her father's office she saw the town drifting into factional lawlessness. She heard of all the grim doings—Kingman's killing of the claim-jumper, the murder of the teamster and the lynching of McClusky's two ruffians. These episodes horrified her.

Of John Kingman she hardly gave a thought. In her youthful eyes the gaunt prophet of Sundown Valley was an awkward, uncouth ruffian who generally needed a shave. He had killed a man, and that fact made him rather a fearsome creature in her eyes. As one of her father's crude friends he was entitled to courteous treatment; but that was all.

Her personal life was calm. By tacit consent the community shielded her from the slightest embarrassing contact. She never had trouble with any one. Even the toughest customers were polite and a little awed, for she was the only real gentlewoman in the town.

Then suddenly she met some new arrivals.

They came on a blustery January morning, tying colorful ponies at the hitching-rack. They shuffled in silently and lined up against the counter. Their eyes were deep-set, and their cheek-bones were high. Their hair was long, black and dirty, hanging down to the shoulders. Their clothes were baggy, with beads adorning their persons from head to foot.

The nearest Indian pointed toward a bit of gimcrack jewelry in a case. Maryland produced it. Then he pointed to a carton of tobacco, some blankets, a jack-knife, a box of candy, two bolts of red calico, a case of prunes, a bag of flour, a sack of beans, a carton of crackers and a box of canned tomatoes, passing each article back to his friends.

Then the whole crowd turned and started for the door.

Maryland didn't know what to do. Her father was absent, and her commercial instincts were limited. Even the clerk was gone for the moment and she felt lonely and helpless. A gangling white customer solved her difficulty.

"Hey!" he yelled to the invaders. "Where's your money?"

The leader of the Indians, smaller than the rest, turned and snarled. His animal eyes peered from beneath a thatch of greasy, black hair held in place by a faded band of green-and-white beadwork. His hatchet face and cruel, hooked nose made the eyes even more sinister.

It was Lobo, hereditary chief of a whipped tribe, costumed in crude moccasins, a ragged pair of black pants and a sweaty, faded tan shirt whose tails fell over the trousers fore and aft. On his chest hung an intricate string of beads, with more of them sewed down the front of his shirt.

"Money?" he growled. "I got no money."

"Then put them things down! Wadda you think this is—a free-lunch counter?"

"You go to the ——! Shut up!"

"What?"

The flabbergasted white man didn't realize the situation. From the Indians' viewpoint the matter was very simple. Things had been scarce at the reservation. They heard that white folks went into this store and came out laden with packages. They planned to do likewise. It looked simple. Very.

"Wadda you mean, comin' here like this?" demanded the white man. "What are you doin' off the reservation anyhow?"

The vicious young chieftain scorned to reply. He started to follow his companions shuffling out of the doorway.

"Hey!" shrieked the white man.

There was a knot of folks on the porch. They heard the rumpus. They stormed inside, plowing a way through the laden Indians. In the lead was Big Dan McClusky.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"Them Injuns is cleanin' out the store!"

McClusky halted and looked sarcastic. "Oh, well; let 'em clean. It ain't my store!"

The lanky citizen's face flushed.

"Say—what are you—a hawg? Don't you know how to act in front of a lady?"

The big freighter saw Maryland for the first time as she stood petrified behind the counter. He took off his hat with elaborate courtesy.

"Oh, excuse me, ma'am. I didn't see you. That's different. Now watch me bust 'em!"

As if to make up for his previous slowness the big brute grabbed the nearest Indian by the collar, shook him, cuffed him, kicked him, slammed him against the counter and wrenched a box of candy out of his convulsive hands. Then McClusky turned upon the next Indian.

This aborigine was more dangerous. A knife flashed. The freighter's big paw grasped a wrist. Another paw whacked a coppery face.

The slap seemed to crackle through the whole tribe like an affront. Resentful Indians dropped packages. They converged upon the big teamster. Instantly there was a clawing, squirming mass of struggling natives seeking to get at him.

Then the other whites sailed in.

They rushed the grunting Indians to the doorway. They hit, kicked, slapped and shoved. There was a mass of whirling bodies which threw out Indians as a grindstone throws out sparks. There were cries, yells and grunts. Indian after Indian bounced out of the doorway and literally bit the dust.

Lobo had kept out of the clatter. He stood away from the crowd while his lethal eyes took in every movement and every slap. His cunning brain plotted to take advantage of this business.

His tribe was split. Whisky had caused the braves to fight one another. The present incident, and possibly a little more whisky, could just about reunite the tribe in fiery hatred of the white man. News of this outrage in the store would stiffen their spines. It would go through the whole tribe.

He would see that it did. He, Lobo, was a warrior. He wanted war. He had preached resistance to the white man. Older heads had held him down, but now even the older heads would be angered!

A thundering voice aroused the little chieftain. Big Dan McClusky was bearing down upon him.

"Git outa here!" roared the freighter.

Lobo was slow to obey. McClusky's giant paw slammed down on his shoulder.

"Git!"

Lobo wriggled from under. Anger boiled up. He shook his clenched fist. Words poured to his snarling lips, so fast he could hardly utter them.

"Yes! I go! I go! Bimeby I come back! Bimeby I cut your —— —— hearts out! Bimebly I bust whole —— white man town all to ——! White man all robber! Robber! Robber!

"White man come here, take Injun land away, chase Injun to reservation! Feedum mush and —— —— corn beef, beans, garbage! Tell Injun lay down. Tellum be good dog. Talk to Injun like dog! Talk to Lobo like dog! Me! Me! Me! A chief!"

The Indian's vehement hands pounded his beaded chest.

"Some day I come back like real chief! Some day I come bust whole town! You go to ——! You —— —— ——!"

A fist cracked into the stream of bad language. McClusky knocked him cold in the doorway, then picked him up, walked outside, and tossed him into the street, after which the teamster boss returned to the store.

"Them Injuns shouldn't talk like that around a lady!" he grunted.

Maryland Cavalier felt that she needed air.

"Thank you," she said weakly. "Thank you very much!"

"It's all right, ma'am. If you want anybody else licked, call on me!"

And the big brute, with an ingratiating leer, strode out of the store.

MARYLAND was preoccupied during the next few days. The fight had jolted her. It is all right to hear of these things second-hand, but seeing them is different. The episode made a terrific impression upon her. Then the Indians made her uneasy. Their threats grew in her mind. She told her fears to her father at last, but he took little notice of them.

"They are the least of our troubles," he decided.

The words were reassuring, but she had a growing premonition that something was amiss. She did not know what. It baffled her. On the night of the talk with her father she threshed about in bed for hours, wondering what made her so nervous.

Once, when dozing off, she thought there was a faint sound as of a floor-board creaking underfoot; but when she awakened and listened there was not a sound. Finally she dozed again and at length went to sleep.

A shot cracked near by.

Maryland heard it. There was no doubt what it was. It jolted her slumbers. Startled, she sat bolt upright. Then she jumped out of bed. The sound had come from in front of the house.

Throwing on a wrap, she ran to the front window and looked out. The store with its broad porches loomed near by, a silent silhouette in the darkness.

The dull reflections in the glass of the store's door stealthily vanished, as if the door had changed its angle. Four black ghosts emerged. The watching girl was not sure of it till they left the shadow of the porch and turned down an alley behind the building.

The store was robbed!

Her first impulse was to warn her father. She knocked at his door softly. There was no answer. She went inside and groped for the bed. She reached down to touch his shoulder. Her fingers came upon a warm but empty pillow. Her father was gone!

Thoroughly alarmed, she threw on a cloak and hastened to the store. It took courage, but she hardly thought of the danger. Her father must be there!

Down the street a watchman was hurrying along with a lantern. She did not wait for him, but made straight for the door. It was open. Hesitating only for a moment lest some enemy be lurking within, she plunged through the doorway and made for the little rear office.

She reached for the lamp. Her foot struck something soft on the floor. With trembling hands she struck a match. The old-fashioned sulfur slowly ignited, casting a dim bluish radiance. Later, the flaming match burned her paralyzed hand; but she did not notice it.

Thomas Cavalier, the beloved merchant of Wingate, lay dead on the floor.

VIII

THE death of Thomas Cavalier left John Kingman stranded high and dry. The gaunt prospector who had dreamed of an empire found himself alone and helpless, cut loose from any aid.

Under the gloomy Winter sun lay a long, irregular gash that ran through the earth along the tops of the bare hills above Sundown Valley. That was all he had to show for his work, struggles and aspirations.

The news of Cavalier's death came by a rider from town. It stunned Kingman. That night as he lay in his bunk in the ramshackle little shanty, with the winds soughing around its loose corners and rattling the loose boards, he tried to think up some way to salvage the wreck. The insistent ghoulish sighing of the winds seemed to bring again the wheedling voice of Solomon Meyers—

"With Cavalier oud of it, I can let you pass on my land."

For an instant Kingman's way seemed clear. He was no longer bound to Cavalier. He could join Meyers. He and Meyers could build that ditch. In two months the water would be rippling down into Sundown Valley!

And then Kingman started laughing at himself.

How long would he last with Meyers, now that Cavalier was gone? The shadow of the stout merchant had protected John Kingman. There had been trouble, but things could have been much worse. And now Kingman was just a poor unattached prospector in a land dominated by Meyers and Big Dan McClusky!

Why, Meyers wouldn't have to deal with him, or even fight him! Meyers could sit down and wait. He could let time do its work. Kingman would be lucky to scratch out a living at ordinary labor somewhere. The dream of Sundown Valley was only a dream!

There be times in some men's lives when they come to the end of the trail. Many thus beaten get up and go at something else. Others remain to batter their stubborn heads against stone walls. A scant few try to think up some way to get around the obstacles by another path, still keeping their eyes on the ultimate goal.

The gaunt prospector in the little shanty was one of the third category.

He had not the slightest faith in Meyers. He hardly had faith in himself. But Sundown Valley loomed bigger than all else. It must be held. Meyers could grab the Kingman idea and put it through; but this would mean trickery, shrewd real-estate deals, and profits for a plotter. It was not for this that Kingman had dreamed. He had to find some other way. Even though it meant banding every friend of Cavalier's and to a finish!

That was the only idea that Kingman had left; but he clung to it.

Before dawn he was in the saddle and riding past the sleeping camp of the helter-skelter Rogers family, with the nostrils of his horse blowing steam into the cold air. By sunrise he was out of the valley. Before ten he was in town.

There was an air of depression in the place. It was strangely quiet even for mid-morning, bereft of the usual loungers who loafed on the porches. Hitching-racks were deserted. A horseless buggy lay in front of an empty blacksmith shop. In Dan McClusky's corral at the end of the street there was not a single animal, and the bales of hay alongside the corral seemed unguarded.

Kingman noticed an aproned bartender sitting drowsily in front of a saloon, and yelled at him.

"What's happened?"

"Cavalier got killed."

"I know; but where's everybody?"

"Chasin' Injuns."

"Oh. Did they kill Cavalier?"

"I dunno. McClusky says they did, so everybody went hootin' off towards the reservation with him. Looks like the crowd got stampeded. Funny McClusky's so darned anxious to git after Cavalier's killers, ain't it?"

"How does he know the Injuns did it?"

"I reckon it's a danged sight more healthy to lay it on to the Injuns than anybody else, ain't it?"

"Looks like it."

"Yeh. Feelin' was runnin' pretty high. I guess Big Dan wanted to let folks blow off steam. They're a-rampin' all over the country, lookin' for the trails of the murderers. Mebbe the Injuns done it at that. Some of 'em came in here a while back and acted sorter or'nary. Made threats. Mebbe Big Dan was right after all."

"Was Cavalier's store robbed?"

"Yep. They cleaned the cash drawer. Two-three thousand or so. Mostly gold."

"Thanks."

In a sense the information encouraged Kingman. The friends of Cavalier were riding on the crest of an aroused popular feeling. They held the whip hand. If the friends of Cavalier could stand shoulder to shoulder that way for the great project fathered by Kingman and fostered by Cavalier, all might yet be well.

Meantime Kingman bethought himself of Maryland. He went to Kingman's cozy little one-story home where the clerk, a self-appointed guard, kept watch between the store and the little picket fence which bounded the merchant's home garden. Within the fence were gay little flowers, red, yellow, white and purple, looking too pert and cheerful for a house of death. It was the only garden in town; but somehow its flaunting colors seemed out of place.

This was Kingman's first visit to the clean little home, and he stood abashed and awkward in an environment of curtains, carpets, upholstery and knicknacks. For years he had camped under the stars. A civilized home awed him.

Maryland, pale of face and low of voice, tried to set him at ease; but she was ill at ease herself. Her world had fallen apart. Nothing worth while was left. She was stunned and bewildered, a stranger in a strange land, without knowing where to turn for comfort, understanding or help.

Kingman pitied her. There was something in the aloof manner of this dark-haired young patrician which brought a queer feeling to his throat. He stood and twiddled his ragged hat.

"I came to see if—mebbe there's somethin' I can do," he offered lamely.

Her big, brown, tearless eyes appraised him. He was ragged, homely and boorish; but he was one of her father's closest friends—such as he was—and that fact threw a certain distinction upon him. This lanky, unshaven, booted tramp with the mystic eyes was about the closest approach to a friend she had!

To his astonishment, the girl accepted his tender.

"You can do much for me," she admitted. "Much—if you will."

"How?"

"The store. The hired men. The funeral— I can not— I have a clerk, but he is too young. There are a thousand things——"

Kingman took hold. He leaped at the opportunity. He arranged for the funeral. He took charge of the merchant's effects. He did everything possible to make the girl's position less onerous and her grief less poignant. With a tact unexpected in such a man he saw that the lonely girl endured not the slighest annoyance.

In a way she understood and gave him a gracious appreciation; but otherwise she was a little more aloof and serious, keeping to her home, a quiet, wordless, proud soul which sought consolation within itself.

The dead merchant's accounts showed that Kingman really owed him nearly two thousand dollars. It had gone for food, clothing, mounts, lumber, plows and all the other things that helped the work on the ditch.

It wasn't a loan exactly. It was a personal investment; but now Kingman felt that he was morally obligated to return the money to Maryland Cavalier. If she desired the partnership to continue, well and good; but first the account must be made clear to her.

He didn't want to owe her money. He didn't like to have their dealings put on this basis. But there it was, staring him in the face—two thousand dollars!

MEYERS approached him during his task in the store. There was a queer truce in the town, as if the shadow of Cavalier's murder had sobered every one into quieter moods. The wily Meyers went right into the little office where Kingman was trying to make head or tail of some accounts, and planted himself in Cavalier's great chair.

"I come to see you," propitiated Meyers, secretly amused at the prospector's awkward labors at bookkeeping. "Now maybe we do pizness, no?"

"Business? Here? What do you mean?"

"You remember up in der hills? Maybe now you feel better. You want to see der valley bloom. So do I. I make it bloom. You have not der money. I have it. Maybe I can buy you oud maybe. No?"

"No!"

"But you have no money. How can you go ahead? How can you even make a living? I give you a goot offer. I buy oud der vell."

"How much?" speculated Kingman from curiosity.

"Five hundred dollars. It iss not worth so much, but——"

"No!" snarled Kingman.

"But why? I make der valley full of vater like you can't do. Would you stand in der way of everyding? Would you be like der dog in der mancher?"

Kingman's eyes became greenish. For dog-in-the-manger stunts, Meyers had performed a masterpiece when he grabbed the land which cut off Kingman's right-of-way; and now the oily little trader was accusing Kingman! The prospector threw up his hands.

"Oh, thunder! What's the use?"

"So! Dot iss right! Now you talk goot talk. Vot iss der use of fighting? No use. So. Now I ask you to sell maybe. It iss goot bizness."

Kingman spluttered.

"Say—look here—if you're so darned anxious to get water up there, why don't you give me a right-of-way across your lands? Why not help? Why not take your profit out of trade and the lands you own? What do you want? Everything?"

The little merchant took it calmly. He realized Kingman's position. Meyers had the whip hand. He knew it. There wasn't any more talk about cooperation. Meyers wanted that pool and the ditch. Nothing less!

"You have der money to keep on?" he inquired softly.

The question hammered into Kingman's weak spot. He was "broke." He had only five dollars to his name, and that was loaned by Cavalier. When the five was gone he had only two alternatives—to sell out to Meyers or remain as a beggar, accepting the bounty of Maryland Cavalier, a woman!

There was a possibility that Cavalier's friends would come to the rescue, but that was debatable. Somehow the plan didn't look so well in the light of day. Cavalier's friends were all poor men, most of them in debt to the merchant themselves.

"You have der money und der power to fight Big Dan McClusky?" continued the insinuating voice of the trader.

"What has McClusky got against me?"

The merchant shrugged.

"You shot his man one time. You arrested his men. Maybe you wass in der crowd what hung his two men, no?"

"Oh, I see."

"You have der money to make good your ditch?"

The little trader's insistence and tenacity would wear away a rock. He never let go. Kingman felt a shudder of revulsion and despair. The hand of the little schemer was almost upon Sundown Valley. Kingman's only hope lay in some desperate chance to interest Cavalier's friends. Otherwise he was gone!

The gaunt prospector sighed and turned away with eyes averted.

"I'll see. Come around day after tomorrow."

"Ah! Now you talk goot talk! Now I see you have der brains! All right. I am in no hurry. I come day after tomorrow. Now we are friends, no?"

And he extended a hand.

Kingman turned his back, but the merchant was unabashed. His smile did not abate one whit as he walked through the door, rubbing his hands.

Kingman, who had turned toward the back of the store, noticed a form moving from behind a stack of overalls, blankets and clothing. A slim, black-mustached face appeared over the top, and then a well-clad body turned the corner of the pile, walking in one boot and holding another in his hands. It was Dick Childs, the gambler with the solemn visage, who was buying footgear from the clerk. Kingman didn't know he was in the store.

"I heard it," remarked Childs.

"Yes? What of it?"

"Fightin' a lonely fight, ain't you?"

"Yep."

"You've got Meyers and McClusky against you, haven't you?"

"Yep."

"Do you want McClusky to get his fingers into your proposition?"

"Not if I can help it!"

"Not even if you have to fight?"

"I'm puttin' up the best fight I can."

Solemn Dick's cold eyes appraised Kingman from head to foot.

"Well, I'm a gambler. I'll take a sporting chance. You go ahead and fight to a finish. I'll back you for anything up to ten thousand dollars."

IX

OVER a far-flung collection of hills, plains, valleys and dry washes swept a dusty cavalcade in search for the murderers of Thomas Cavalier, spreading far afield in the daytime and closing up at night. But their efforts were vain. No marauding Indians appeared.

In two days the riders only sighted a freight team, five prospectors, an Army rider and a Chinaman hauling provender for his restaurant.

The third day brought the searchers toward the great reservation, ninety miles east of town, where the remnants of a once powerful tribe were trying to exist as boarders of Uncle Sam. The latter was represented by a somewhat shady politician who was supposed to be making money out of supplies sent the Indians, so the latter were not exactly overnourished. Their idea of Uncle Sam was pithy and blasphemous.

The posse from town came toward the boundary of the reservation along about noon. One Anderson, a mustached veteran of the desert who acted as sort of a leader, held up a hand to his own little group and they halted.

"We might as well git together," he advised. "No use skirmishin' into the reservation this-a-way. It don't look dignified. Call everybody in."

Couriers departed, and soon the townsmen gravitated toward the common center. In front of them a gentle slope dotted with green sage-brush led to a broad valley at whose far end lay the Indian camp. When the riders were all collected they started down the slope.

The posse was a bit puzzled. With anger in their hearts they had started a vague but hopeful tour of the waste lands, filled with faith that the murderers would be caught somewhere and given their just deserts. But now faith and hope were lagging.

There was only one remaining chance. The Indians who had eluded them would probably be back at the reservation. A stern front and a few intelligent questions might bring the murderers to light.

Anderson looked about the crowd as it rode along. The posse wasn't as big as when it started. Some folks had left already.

"Where's Dan McClusky?" demanded Anderson.

A red-bearded McClusky employee answered up:

"Him? Oh, he started for the railroad this mornin'. Had to 'tend to his freight teams."

"Oh, all right. What's the difference?"

In a short time the cavalcade came up to the little store-house and the agent's residence, which faced a white flag-pole alongside a well. This was the official headquarters of the United States Government.

The agency was a shiftless-looking place, set here because there happened to be water and an old abandoned ranch-house on the spot. Beyond these, around the turn of a brownish hill, were scattered the domiciles of the tattered tribe—here a tent, there a flimsy shanty, yonder a tumble-down thing, half-house and half-dugout.

Around each of these residences were rags, dead ashes, peelings, old cans, a few chickens, many dogs, and various little copper-skinned children with stark black hair, wearing nothing in particular. A dozen or so of fat squaws in red and yellow calico waddled around or washed things in the tiny stream which trickled down from the artesian well. One or two lazy braves loafed in the sun and smoked Government tobacco.

When the mounted horsemen appeared, the Indian agent, one Skillings, strode out of his residence. He was a lean-faced, bald-headed person with eyes a little too close together and a reputation fragrant throughout the county.

"What's the visit for?" he demanded.

"We're after the Injuns that killed Cavalier!"

"Injuns killed Cavalier? Well! What makes you think they're here?"

"Because they ain't nowhere else. We've looked!"

The agent frowned.

"They couldn't have killed him. They ain't allowed to leave the reservation."

"No? Well, this here Lobo went to town some time ago and stirred up considerable ructions!"

The agent looked uncomfortable. His charges were supposed to stay put. He could not admit that they got away from him. True, he had been too lazy to count noses for a long time; but that was his own business.

"How long ago was this?" he asked. "Before the killin'?"

"Yep. Two-three days before."

"Oh. That time. I gave Lobo special permission. He got back next day. He's over in that shanty yonder."

The posse was balked. They looked at each other.

"We-ell," ventured Anderson uncertainly, "mebbe we better look at Lobo."

"Go ahead. See for yourself."

And the virtuous agent led the way.

Lobo was inside the tumble-down shed. A beady-eyed squaw announced the arrival of the visitors. The dirty little chieftain finally appeared at the entrance of the shanty with hair tousled and eyes bleared as if from a debauch. Other braves began to come up and stand around to hear the palaver.

"What you want?" snarled Lobo.

"Mebbe we'll want you!" snapped Anderson. "Who killed Cavalier, hey? Who killed him?"

Anderson leaned forward in the saddle to watch the Indian's face change expression. It didn't.

"Why you ask me?" rasped the little chief. "You think I kill'm? Why? Why? Why? You go to ——? Whole —— crowd go to ——! Ugh! Go home!"

"Here now! None of that! Where was you yesterday and the day before? Hey?"

The chief's face looked puzzled and angry. He turned toward Skillings, the agent.

"One white man bad enough here. Now whole —— tribe of ——-fool white man come here, talk about kill! Phoo!"

Lobo faced Anderson and tapped his own chest softly with his fists. Despite the little scoundrel's mean face and small stature there was a queer dignity to him.

"Me chief!" he cried. "Me, Lobo, chief! Is chief like dog? Is Injun war tribe like dog? Must chief of war tribe give talk every time —— fool white man come here? Shut up! Go to ——! Go home!"

"Here!" yelled Anderson. "This here's a posse, see? We're after a murderer! You keep a civil tongue in your mouth or we'll ram it down your throat!"

The little chief's eyes became pin-points. He darted a vengeful glance at Anderson. Then he sprang inside. His hands gripped a rifle. It was an instant too late. The agent leaped. He just grabbed the weapon in time.

"Leggo!" he gasped, struggling with the Indian. "Here, you fellers outside—dust outa here! I shouldn't have allowed this! You've stirred 'em up again!"

"They can't come into our town and kill its citizens!" snorted Anderson.

"Better'n their killin' everybody else!" panted the agent, still holding the gun-barrel.

Lobo wrenched the weapon away.

It was a sudden move and threw the agent off his balance. Before he could recover the little chief's thumb had cocked the weapon. The agent tried to grasp it again. The barrel swung high. There was a blinding explosion. Part of the shanty's roof blew upward.

A dark form came through the acrid powder-smoke. A deep voice bellowed at Lobo and the agent. It was the Mysterious Gent. He had been looking over the reservation and heard the rumpus.

"Stop this!" he commanded. "Lobo, put down that gun! Where'd you get it anyhow? Smuggle it in?"

Lobo glared ferociously.

"I kill you!" he snarled. "I kill you! I kill every —— —— white man every place!"

"Better not! There's ten troops of cavalry over at the fort! You keep still!"

The Mysterious Gent turned toward Anderson and the posse.

"Vamoose out of here! This here's a bad Injun! What do you want to do—get him started off the reservation? You fellers ain't got no more brains than a lizard!"

"We're lookin' for murderers!" defended Anderson. "This ain't the time to worry about peoples' feelin's!"

"Well, go look for 'em somewhere else! Get out!"

"Yeh, you better go," seconded the agent. "This is Federal land. Git off it!"

"We'll go!" grunted Anderson. "We'll go, but we'll keep a watch on these here Injuns! You hear me talk? We'll watch the whole blamed reservation! We've heard things about this place! Mebbe if there wasn't so much whisky and stealin' and gun-runnin' around here, them Injuns wouldn't be actin' so mean!"

"Git out!" roared the agent.

The posse went. As they looked back they saw Lobo glaring maledictions at themselves and the two white men they left behind. The other Indians had done nothing but watch the affair; but in their eyes was a silent, somber expression that made the posse feel uncomfortable.

"Mebbe the Mysterious Gent was right at that," conceded Anderson when he had cooled down somewhat. "Them Injuns looks like they're about ready to start trouble."

"They shore do!" agreed the red-bearded

McClusky man alongside him. "I'm durned glad we're out of it!"

Crestfallen, the crowd rode along the backward trail for home. They all seemed to make a bee-line by common consent, huddling together, stirrup to stirrup, saying nothing, but thinking many things.

Later, when the afternoon was well along, they rode down the side of a mountain range and into a long valley which boasted a well in the middle. Alongside the well stood a lone and leafless cottonwood-tree, a solitary landmark in the great and dismal flat. The silent cavalcade swung toward it as if by habit. Gradually they approached it.

The McClusky man alongside Anderson absently reached into a back pocket and pulled forth a red bandanna handkerchief. Glinting objects flew out of the bandanna and struck the ground.

The quick flash caught the eye of Anderson. He stopped. So did the men behind him. They looked down. Six gold pieces shone amid the sands!

Anderson gasped.

"What ——?"

The red-faced man's visage turned white. He tried to spur his horse. The guilty action sentenced him. A dozen arms pinioned his hands to his side and took his weapons away. In an instant he was off his horse. Men dismounted and grouped around him, tense with suspicion. Teamsters are not usually loaded with gold pieces.

"Where'd you git that money?" demanded Anderson.

"It's—it's my pay. I've been savin' it. To buy a hoss."

"Search him!"

The men went through his pockets. They picked out several small gold pieces. His story seemed straightforward enough, but the men remembered he had tried to spur his horse. They were not satisfied. They stripped him of his shirt and brought forth a money-belt packed with gold.

"I reckon you wanted a mighty expensive horse, didn't you?" growled Anderson.

Suddenly hoofs pounded outside the interested circle of men. All eyes turned that way. Three of the posse had slipped to horse and mounted. Before any one could think of action they were several hundred yards away and galloping for life. The posse drew weapons. There was a quick fusillade of shots, but none were accurate. Most of the dumfounded posse stood and watched. They didn't know what it was all about.

"McClusky's men ridin' away!" gasped Anderson. "Three runnin' and one here! It was four men that robbed the store!"

He stopped, astounded at the revelation.

"The nerve of them! They rode right along with us all the time! Let us stir up trouble with the Injuns! They had the money in their belts all the time! The sons of guns! The nerve of them!"

A volley rattled from the posse. Some of them jumped to their horses and started in pursuit of the fleeing men. Anderson and the knot in the center paid no further attention.

"We've got one," said Anderson grimly. "Now let's hold court!"

NEXT noon the dusty posse made its way into town and halted at Cavalier's store, where Kingman was still wrestling with the books. He heard the whole tale from the mustached Anderson.

"And three got away?" asked Kingman.

"Yep. Guess we'll never see 'em again."

"How about the fellow you caught?"

"Him? Oh, there's a cottonwood-tree right alongside that well over there."

X

KINGMAN now had financial backing of a sort, but he soon realized he was little better off than before except that he didn't have to worry about the next meal. He still owed two thousand dollars to the heiress of Thomas Cavalier. Meyers still blocked his plans for the ditch.

Kingman tried to get Meyers to sell. He made a bee-line for the store. The wrinkled little merchant rubbed his hands with satisfaction when the gaunt prospector swung through his door, but when Kingman made his offer Meyers blinked.

"You want to buy my land? You? You? Why? How? Where you get der money?"

"I can pay. How much do you want?"

"Want? I want nodding. You know I want to buy!"

"So do I. What's your price?"

The merchant began to gesticulate.

"Someding iss behind this! You are

broke. You are a nobody. Now you want to buy. To buy! Someding—somebody iss behind this! Who? Who?"

The merchant's shrewd little eyes peered into Kingman's face.

"You tell me who. Maybe then I think about selling, no?"

"No!"

The merchant shrugged. His hands made a Semitic gesture.

"Oh, well. I find oud soon! I find oud! You can not play tricks with me! Not with Solomon Meyers! No!"

"Tricks?" roared Kingman. "Why, you dirty little —— sharper, what do you mean, talkin' about tricks? If it wasn't for your tricks I wouldn't have had any trouble! Tricks! If you wasn't full of tricks you'd have let the water flow down into Sundown long ago! You'd better let go some of your tricks, mister, or you'll find yourself in a hole!"

Meyers pointed toward the door.

"Oud of my store!" he yelped. "Oud! Oud! *'Raus!* Oud, you tramp! Loafer! Nobody! I sell you noding! Noding! Stay oud till you are broke! Then you can come back und I buy you oud for a nickel! *Schwein!* Loafer! Tramp! Oud of my store!"

Kingman could have taken him apart, but the lanky prospector went. He understood the whole matter now. Meyers was not to be reasoned with and didn't intend to be reasoned with. The canny trader saw into the future and realized that Sundown Valley was worth ten years of plotting if necessary. Meyers wanted it all. Kingman was disheartened in spite of his backing from Gambler Childs.

The backing of Childs was genuine enough, but not for the noble purpose of developing the country. He saw Kingman only as a thorn in the side of Big Dan McClusky and possibly Meyers. He explained his position exactly.

"I want to see the valley bloom. Oh, yes. Sure. Shoot the water down the hills. If you can tie McClusky and Meyers down and squirt the whole pool down their —— —— throats, so much the better. Go right ahead. I'll stand behind you as long as you keep trying!"

Kingman wasn't squeamish about taking this backing from a gambler and cardsharp. In fact, he never thought of the question at all. Sundown Valley was the only thing that mattered. But Maryland Cavalier looked at it differently.

Putting in her time at the store, seeking any task which would occupy her distracted mind, she was soon aware that the dusty prospector was a bigger man than he looked. He was a leader of her father's friends. He had taken disagreeable tasks off her shoulders and performed them well. He had protected her from worry and annoyance. And now he had more money than before. She sensed he had found backing somewhere. He broached the subject himself.

"The books show I owe you about two thousand dollars. If you need it right away, mebbe I can scrape it up."

"Why, I never thought of it! What got that idea into your head?"

"Nothin', miss. Only, I hate to be owin' you money."

"You mean you would like to have me out of your pool and everything?"

"Me? No, ma'am! I'm workin' at it harder because you're in it. But I thought mebbe you might want to be out of it."

She appraised him with wide eyes, wondering just how much his confession meant; and then she smiled, though somewhat wanly.

"Where would you get the money?"

"Childs is backin' me."

"Childs? Childs? You mean that gambler? Do—do you mean to say you are dealing with me while accepting money from that sort of a person?"

"Yes, ma'am."

The answer was simple, deferential, humble, without any attempt at defense. Maryland caught her breath. She saw him from a new viewpoint, as either a culprit or as a simpleton who knew no better. She chose the latter judgment.

"I am sorry."

"Yes, ma'am. So am I."

"Then why did you do it?"

"The ditch must be built, ma'am."

"At such a cost?"

"At any cost, ma'am, except to you."

She looked into his eyes again, seeking to judge just how much of it was personal. A tiny glimmer of suspicion came into her mind that this awkward fellow might some day master her; but his homely face showed a quiet sincerity which disarmed resentment. She nodded.

"Thank you. Then I will try to make allowances."

Kingman soon went back to his pool. The commercial field was not to his liking, and the continued presence of Maryland Cavalier brought him a strange unrest and a queer self-consciousness. He didn't know just what to do about it, so he broke for the open country again where he could think it over.

He worked like a Trojan for three weeks. He improved his shanty. He plowed deeper furrows along his ditch-line and blew away rock-ledges where they impeded his water-course. Day after day he kept at it with pick, shovel, plow and dynamite.

Behind his shanty, at the top of a steep gulch leading down to the valley, he dug out a mighty hole and banked it around with earth. Here was the outlet, the terminal of the ditch-line, where water could be controlled by gates and distributed to the valley when needed.

On a near-by peak he could see Meyers' armed guard keeping sardonic watch on his operations. Down below in the valley the clan of Tom Rogers was cheering his progress, like rooters on the side-lines. Sometimes a wandering atom of the clan came up to keep him company.

The Rogers farm was beginning to take shape. The family, stranded but still valiant and hopeful for the future, pottered around on a thousand little ideas to make the place better. Wooden posts arose on the Rogers boundary. A fence began to connect the posts—wire, rope, old harness, anything that would hang together. A shanty was arising.

Bales of hay were brought in to feed the stock. Bedding and things, once piled helter-skelter around the wagons, disappeared into tents and makeshift coverings.

Kingman paid them a visit or two. The husky Molly made him very much at home. The big, buxom, capable blonde overwhelmed him with kindness. He ate home-made pies and biscuits. He received the seat of honor at the table. The whole tribe vied to make him feel important.

It was all very pleasant until he heard one of the urchins refer to him as "Molly's beau." After that he became more thoughtful and visited less with the Rogers family.

In time Kingman's food supplies began to run low, so he went back to town. He arrived at nearly the same time as Big Dan McClusky, but the reception was very different.

It was just after dark, with lights of saloons and dance-halls throwing their illumination out through many doors and windows. There was a crowd in the streets, a grumbling mob which stood around in little knots as if waiting for a signal. They hailed Kingman joyously as he rode into the street. The mustached Anderson almost pulled him off his horse.

"What's it all about?" demanded Kingman.

"Ain't you heard? Dan McClusky's comin' back to town. Been away for weeks."

"Well, what of it?"

"What of it? After the killin' of Cavalier? Huh—I wouldn't think he'd dare show his face here again. Folks advised him to stay away, but he ain't got no sense a-tall!"

A voice called from far away—

"He's comin'!"

There was an answering roar. The crowd surged along the street. Some distance away a rider on a plunging horse arrived. He was quickly surrounded by men coming from front, rear and flank. He plied a quirt at those grabbing his bridle-reins. With an oath he threw the quirt away and reached back. A dozen gun-barrels glinted toward him in the light from the open windows.

"None o' that, McClusky!" roared a voice. "Drop it!"

The big teamster-boss dropped it. When actually confronted by the townsmen he began to realize that his coming was perhaps a little untimely; but if he had any fears he hid them well by a volley of profanity that seemed to make the lights in the saloons flicker.

Over the tops of moving heads his great bulk loomed, calling down maledictions on everything and everybody. From all directions came more men to join the great circle milling around Big Dan.

"There's the feller that had Cavalier killed!" bawled a voice.

"You lie!" bellowed McClusky.

"Your gang done it!" jeered another. "How much did you get out of it?"

If McClusky's face was white no one could see it. He sat his plunging horse like a centaur, trying to think up an answer. Suddenly a voice arose above the din—

"String him up!"

It was what John Kingman feared. It was just the catchword to spur the excitable mob into action, turning righteous anger into lawlessness. There had been too much of this business lately!

"No!" thundered Kingman.

He spurred his horse, lunged through the crowd and held up his hand for silence.

"No! We've had enough lynchin'! You're runnin' amuck! Stop it!"

"His gang killed Cavalier!" snarled a citizen.

"Yep. They've done a lot of things! That gives you no license to kill folks, gents!"

There were grumblings, mumblings and hoots in the crowd. Kingman knew that a dozen personal grudges against McClusky were hungering for satisfaction. He cared nothing for Big Dan, but the principle of law and order was at stake. As a landowner and a planner for the future he instinctively rebelled against this anarchy, pinning his hope on the real Cavalier men, the solid citizens in the crowd.

"Cavalier would be against this, and you know it!" he roared.

"He's not here now!" shouted a voice.

"No; but I am!"

Kingman had a bright idea. He laid a hand on McClusky's tense shoulder.

"Daniel McClusky," he thundered in dramatic fashion, "I arrest you in the name of the law!"

It was a brilliant move. The crowd was taken aback. Kingman's sudden action forestalled all protest. A minute before the mob had been aroused, excited, clamoring for a lynching-bee. Now some of its members chuckled while the more thoughtful ones turned into the crowd, backing Kingman's play. The gaunt desert hobo was master of the situation.

Some time later the clattering mob escorted the big teamster-boss into the little jail, where the window was still wide open for lack of bars. But this time escape was less simple. Around the jail Kingman placed six of the most reliable men in town. Kingman himself helped keep watch. His plans were vague, but he wanted public feeling to cool down. McClusky's fate would then depend on circumstances.

It was a long vigil, and folks became sleepy. A brush fire sent its lights dancing around the cordon of armed men, but the talk became less as the hours went on, and finally Kingman grew tired of inaction and went into the jail. He was curious about certain past happenings anyhow, and he wanted a talk with Big Dan.

McClusky was pacing up and down, his dusty, bearded face wanly illuminated by the light from a spluttering candle on a rough table. On the floor alongside the table were blankets and an old red quilt. These articles comprised the jail furniture.

The big freighter-boss didn't look downcast. He was angry, like a king upset by some impudent act of lèse-majesté. His sacred leadership, maintained by fist, boot and threats, had received a terrific jolt, and he didn't seem to understand it. When Kingman came through the door he glared.

"Well, wadda you want?" he demanded.

"I want to find the truth about certain happenings in the past."

"Oh. Want to try me beforehand. Is that the idee?"

"Nope. I only want to know just how much damage I owe you for. That's all."

"So you can sic the crowd on to me again?"

"I might. If you're the man that's helped to hold up my ditch proposition, I'm likely to do 'most anything!"

"Oh!"

McClusky's sardonic little eyes looked into Kingman's. There was no friendship in the gaze, but much appraisal and suspicion.

"Mebbe if I told you the truth you wouldn't believe me."

"I don't know. I haven't heard any."

"All right. I'll take a chance. You saved me from them other cattle. I guess I'll give it to you straight. Here's the truth:

"I don't know nothin' about anything. I never heard of them shootin's and things till they was all over. Whatever's been done by my men, it was all done behind my back. Them that I caught I chased out of the country. Mister, I'm one of the respectablest men in the whole danged district!"

XI

IT WAS a queer story Big Dan told John Kingman that night. It was the story of a king in his kingdom failing to hold discipline among his own unruly subjects but jealous of any outside interference whatsoever.

For his men Big Dan was judge, jury and executioner. The community didn't count. The State of Arizona didn't count. He, Daniel McClusky, was amply big enough to handle his own cases!

As for the recent episodes in the county, Big Dan pleaded complete innocence.

"I'm blamed for everything!" he snarled. "What do I know about them things? Did I send that feller up to your claim to jump it that time? I did not! He took his own chances. Did I make them fellers kill Cavalier's freighter? I did not! I didn't know they was near him! They should have been at the railroad where they belonged, loadin' wagons. If I'd caught 'em I'd have knocked their heads off! They didn't obey my orders!"

"Maybe," retorted Kingman, "but I noticed you pulled 'em out of jail!"

"Sure I did! They was my men, wasn't they? Huh! I can handle my own cases, mister!"

"How about the man who let the Indians get a wagon-load of whisky in Sundown Valley?"

"He done me a mean trick and got away. I lost money. The durned fool Injuns let my team scatter all over the valley. The whisky was gone. Total loss. I'd bought it to sell legitimate."

"To the Injuns?"

"Then there's them fellers who killed Cavalier," continued McClusky hastily. "What do I know about it? They cornspired amongst themselves without lettin' me in on it at all. They durn well knew I'd have cut 'em into ribbons!"

Kingman found himself smiling at this man's plain incompetence to control his own men.

"I can't understand how you built up a big freight business!" exclaimed the prospector.

"You can't, hey? Well, I do! It takes brains and fightin', mister. Mostly brains. This feller Meyers thinks he's the only man that has any. He's wrong. I ran the freight-lines before he ever came here. I'll run 'em after he's gone!"

"Meyers is a pretty smart man," hinted Kingman.

"Heh! He ain't smart enough to make Dan McClusky haul his goods for almost nothin'! No, sir! Just because I helped him to fight the Cavalier store ain't no sign I'll let him git freight without payin' for it! No, sir!"

The big bully seemed wrought up about it. Deftly Kingman extracted the story.

It was the old story of a man with a monopoly. Now that Cavalier was dead, Meyers had no active opposition except for Maryland, who didn't fit into the business anyhow. Meyers saw he didn't need McClusky any longer. In fact, it was cheaper for Meyers to do his own hauling, just as Cavalier had done.

The little merchant insinuated these things to McClusky and demanded a lower freight-rate. McClusky refused. Meyers announced he would run his own freight teams. The little merchant was not usually so frank, but tempers were raised to the limit. The session ended with the freighter hurling Meyers over his own counter.

Kingman was glad of the split between the two rogues, but began to have a mild contempt for Big Dan McClusky. Others shared it. Beyond the open window of the calaboose were the faces of Anderson and two or three of his friends, listening to the whole talk.

At first they were concerned for Kingman's safety. Later, as the facts were bawled out by the freighter, they began to grin. The menace of Dan McClusky was a menace no longer. The powerful boss of the freight teams was just a big booby!

Kingman and his friends later discussed it outside, sitting cross-legged around the little fire in front of the jail.

"Oh, shucks!" said Anderson. "Let him go. Somebody's got to keep his crowd licked. Let him do it. It won't make 'em any worse, and mebbe it'll make 'em better. Let him go!"

"We ain't fightin' children and idjuts," agreed another man.

"Let pore old Dan go. He don't know no better."

A little later the guards herded into the calaboose and Kingman pointed outside.

"There's the door. Go to it!"

McClusky's suspicious glance darted around the crowd; but it was no trap. His way was clear. He went through the doorway and disappeared without a single farewell remark. Thus ended the kingship of Big Dan McClusky. He was destined to run the freight teams for many long years, but the awe he had inspired was gone forever.

KINGMAN was pleased with himself. As a representative of law and order he had saved the town from another hanging, but he paid for it next day.

In the forenoon, while Kingman was walking along the street, Gambler Dick Childs strolled off the porch in front of his saloon and walked across the prospector's path.

"What's this I hear about you rescuin' Dan McClusky?" asked Childs.

"Well, I couldn't allow a lynchin', could I?"

"I dunno. It's accordin' to who's lynched."

"I figgered to have a little law in the land. Was I right?"

"Right or wrong, it makes no difference. I didn't back you so you'd help McClusky. I backed you so you'd finish him. Now you've let him go. All right. I guess I'll let you go."

Kingman's face flushed.

"I guess you don't care a hoot about irrigatin' the land, or anything like that!"

"Nary hoot. I ain't runnin' a home for charity. Them that I hires does what they're told or gets out. See?"

"I see. How much do I owe you?"

The gambler snapped his fingers. He wasn't thinking of that. He had taken a sporting chance on Kingman, and he accepted the loss like a gambler.

The episode was a staggering blow for John Kingman. His project for Sundown Valley seemed to have evaporated again. He was just where he was before, only worse. Now he had run through every possible source of aid. Only Anderson and some other friends could offer any assistance, and their help was meager.

"Us boys can rake up five-six-seven hundred," offered Anderson. "If you need it, call on us."

"Thanks," said Kingman. "That helps."

But it didn't. Except for its friendliness, the offer didn't amount to a drop in the bucket.

Kingman walked around the town like a lost sheep, wondering what his next move would be, and meanwhile looking into the Cavalier store to see that all was well with Maryland. Apparently she was getting along finely. The color was coming into her cheeks again.

In the little office, chatting with Maryland, was a slim-waisted cavalry lieutenant, looking handsome in a trim uniform of blue which was just worn enough to show that the wearer had seen a little service. He was an agreeable young fellow with blue eyes, light hair, and a mouth just growing used to a heavy blond mustache.

"Lieutenant Whitney," introduced Maryland, "this is John Kingman, a very good friend of mine. I have grown to think a great deal of John Kingman."

The gaunt prospector felt a sudden thrill of elation at the words. It was the first recognition he had won from her, and it made him glow inwardly; but not for long.

"Lieutenant Whitney and I have known each other for years," explained Maryland. "His father was a neighbor of my father's in the Old Dominion. It is wonderful that we should meet here, isn't it?"

"Yes," admitted Kingman uncertainly.

He decided to stay around town for a while. For the next week he labored at odd jobs wherever he could pick them up, and made it a point to go into the Cavalier store nearly every day. His reception was always very cordial.

More Army officers began to appear in town. Rumor said that Lobo had left the reservation and started on a little killing and burning expedition, taking a few dozen members of his tribe. It was said that the tribe had broached hidden stores of whisky. Braves who were backward had been exhilarated into the stormy but glorious paths of war.

The townsmen took proper precautions, but nobody was excited about Lobo and his gang. The whites had long ago taken the measure of this tribe, and some of the warriors had already become tired or hungry and turned up at the reservation again. A full regiment of cavalry was on the job anyhow. Two troops stayed in town. Other outfits roamed around the hills. Lobo's military operations were expected to be brief.

Kingman took several short trips to the pool to see that all was well, returning generally in the evening and seeing no trace of Indians. Once he was delayed and did not start for town until after nightfall; but the bright, full moon was shining and the way was easy to pick.

Sundown Valley looked different in moonlight. Its bare flats reflected a silvery radiance. Its gaunt, inhospitable mountains and crags took on a new softness.

Sharp granite rocks gleamed blue-white in the far distance, and sinister cañons were obliterated by kindly shadows. The land seemed at peace.

Some of its influence descended on John Kingman. After all, things were not as bad as they might be. He still had the pool, his health and his dreams. Things were progressing very well, considering everything. Very well.

He arrived in town after nine o'clock and ran his horse into a friendly corral. Not being sleepy, he strolled about, seeing nothing in particular to interest him. He walked down the moonlit street and came up to the Cavalier store.

The door was open. A tiny light gleamed in the little office. Kingman didn't know what to make of it. Suspicion gripped him. He remembered the death of Cavalier. Perhaps some one was trying to rob the store again—her store!

With a hand on the butt of his six-shooter Kingman tiptoed softly along the shadowed aisle and halted where the light could not possibly shine upon him, waiting for the intruder to make some noise and betray himself.

There seemed to be a long silence in the office. It was a terrific silence. Finally a man's voice spoke. The voice was hesitant, vibrant, intense, jerking in short sentences.

"—We were only youngsters then. I didn't really care much— But now that I know how beautiful and wonderful you are— Maryland! Look up!"

The rest of his talk was a subdued mumble, mumble, mumble that couldn't be distinguished. There seemed to be a tiny scuffle. Then the voice of Maryland spoke:

"—Take me away, Edward—take me back to my own country. I have tried to accept things here, but I hate it—I hate it!"

"Then sell out this place!" came the eager, joyous voice of the man. "I'll get a furlough and go East as soon as this fool Indian is captured! And then—my Maryland!"

Kingman softly tiptoed out of the store.

XII

KINGMAN thoughtfully went back to his ditch. His morale was shattered, and he hardly had a plan for the future; but he gritted his teeth and forced himself to labor like a slave on the only tangible thing he owned in the world—the water project above Sundown Valley. Hour after hour, day after day, from dawn to dark he struggled on for two weeks while wondering whether his work would ever amount to anything.

Down in the valley the Rogers clan was losing patience. They knew all about the trouble between Kingman and Meyers, but they hated to suffer because of it.

"We gotta have water right quick," pleaded Tom Rogers, visiting at the ditch. "If you can't bring it, let the other feller. I know he's a durned scoundrel and all that. You've got our sympathy, but that don't mean nothin'. Between you and Meyers we ain't gettin' any water."

"Then you think I'd better let him have the ditch-line," said Kingman dully.

"Sure. You can't put it through. He can. This ain't my fight. Why should I suffer because you won't give way?"

"I'll think it over," conceded Kingman.

He began to realize that his stubborn struggle for his rights was only hurting other people. The rancher farther down the valley, a man named Baldwin, was in the same plight as Rogers.

These men meant business. They were legitimate settlers who had bought promising land in good faith and planned to improve it. Even now they had bettered their tracts till the once desolate waste of Sundown Valley boasted two little landmarks of civilization. The fences were up. Virgin land was turned by the plow. Queer tumble-down tent-shanties, made from all sorts of odds and ends, housed them and their broods. Wire and brush corrals were built for the animals. Everything was in place except seeds for planting and water to nourish them.

Then a tent-house began to arise on the Meyers land.

The first indications came when Kingman returned to the pool. A wagon full of lumber swung far into the hills and unloaded in the center of the Meyers property. The house was placed on the saddle between higher hills, right where the water would some day pass on its way to Sundown Valley.

Materials for the house kept streaming in. The dust of freight-wagons was now a common sight in the great dry valley anyhow. The teams of Rogers and the other rancher made daily trips to the pool for drinking-water. McClusky had started a stage-line from the town to the railroad. Cavalier and McClusky freighters operated through the valley on regular schedule. Meyers' stuff added to the traffic. Cavalry detachments and scouts moved up and down the valley and into the hills in every direction.

Continual rumors of Indians came to the ears of Kingman. Once while busy with the plow he met a squad of blue-clad riders who were hoping to corner the elusive Lobo. The corporal in charge of the squad, a battered old regular, was not impressed with the job.

"We've got six-seven hundred men skallyhootin' around after one bum chief and twenty-thirty braves that's probably so loaded they ain't able to move. Mebbe that's why we can't find 'em. Mebbe they're layin' paralyzed in the bottom of some gulch. I hear a few of 'em's sobered up and went back to the res'vation."

"You don't think the Indians will do any damage?"

"Son, I fought Injuns when Injuns was Injuns! This or'nary little pack o' drunkards have got nothin' except some guns and a lot of whisky—both against the law. I don't blame 'em for leavin' the res'vation, but I'd like ter ketch the —— that sold 'em the guns and whisky! I'd ram the stuff down their —— —— throats!"

Kingman knew who sold the whisky, but he couldn't prove it. He didn't care much. He had other things to worry over.

One of his principal worries arrived next day. It was Meyers, riding a gentle horse and accompanied by one of his men. He made a courteous salute, rode up to Kingma's shanty, went inside and sat on a cracker-box alongside the bare table which was the shanty's only furniture.

He seemed to have forgotten that he was on bad terms with Kingman. He ignored the fact that he had promised to buy the prospector out for a nickel, for the growing commerce of Sundown Valley had whetted his desires to own the pool. He was getting impatient. He wanted to buy—so long as it did not cost too much.

Kingman knew what he was here for. Dejectedly the gaunt prospector went inside for the slaughter.

"I am building a house," beamed Meyers, whose man waited outside. "Now we are neighbors. No?"

"I saw the house."

"Yes. Now we are only half a mile apart, your house und mine. Soon we can come closer in other things. No?"

"What's your offer?"

"Aha! You are quicker now at pizness! That iss goot! For you und for me!"

Meyers rubbed his hands.

"How much do you want?" he asked.

"Four or five thousand," guessed Kingman.

Meyers had a fit. He waved his hands and called to Heaven in broken English and guttural German. Kingman was outrageous. Five thousand for a pool and some bare land with a plow-scratch on it? No! Never! If it was worth five hundred then he, Meyers, was a liar; but he felt generous, knowing Kingman's financial condition. Five hundred was plenty.

"I might take three thousand," conceded Kingman with reddened face.

There was another storm. Adjectives spluttered all over the room.

"Three thousand," insisted Kingman.

Meyers had another brainstorm, but Kingman was thinking of the two thousand he owed Maryland Cavalier, and naturally he wanted a little stake for himself.

"Three thousand?" raved Meyers. "Oof! You are foolish! Crazy!"

"For the pool alone," suggested Kingman, who produced a rough account of his expenditures from the very start.

"There's a corral, a hay-station and some sheds and tools at the pool. There's a ditch-line along here. Then there's this house. I built 'em all on borrowed money. If I hadn't done it, you would have to. It's only fair that you count them in. The total amounts to almost two thousand dollars. All I want is to get that back, plus a thousand, and to keep my land down in the valley."

Meyers threw up his hands silently. The gesture was final. Kingman didn't have a chance in the world. The gaunt desert hobo was still trying to cling to the wreckage of his dream-plan, but Meyers knew the man was "broke" and possibly on the verge of starving. Meyers didn't have to pay any three thousand dollars. Nor even five hundred. If necessary he could wait and let Kingman collapse.

"Think it over!" pleaded Kingman, swallowing his pride. "Take the ditch. My lands. Everything. But make it three thousand!"

"Oh, well. Maybe I think it over a month or so."

"A month? No!"

"If I go back to town I can not come back soon. I offer you five hundred dollars. Cash!"

"Make it twenty-five hundred!"

"Five hundred. No more. You think it over. Not me. You. I give you one day. I will go to my shanty und come back tomorrow night. Think it over."

It was cold, merciless, deliberate torture. Meyers knew he had his man; nobody but Meyers was exactly in a position to buy him out; but the little merchant saw that Kingman would hold off till the last minute, till the whole business was torn out of his convulsive hands. Meyers could afford to wait a day or so and let him suffer. Kingman had said some harsh things in the past. Let him pay for them!

When the crafty little schemer left, rubbing his hands, Kingman slumped down and buried his face in his arms. Later he paced up and down in the cabin feverishly. He was like a man behind bars, trying to find a way out. At last he saw a tiny chance—a last dim ray of hope.

Dan McClusky! The big freighter was breaking with Meyers! If Kingman must bow his head, why not bow to a man who owed him a favor? And McClusky could use the pool! And rumor had it that Big Dan was expected to pass through the valley next day!

Kingman rolled into his blankets on the floor that night and slept the sleep of a man reprieved. The hours went by unheeded. Dawn arrived without his knowledge. Then something gripped his shoulder and shook him vigorously. He came out of his slumbers and looked into a heavy, leering face fringed with black whiskers.

It was Dan McClusky with a six-shooter in his hand.

"Wake up!" bawled Big Dan. "Hurry up!"

"What for?" grunted the sleepy Kingman.

A great roar suddenly crashed into his ears and almost stunned him. A bludgeon seemed to strike him across the temples. The air sucked away from his nostrils and then snapped back. The floor-boards tried to leap apart. There was a quick concussion like a million cannon exploding at once.

It was a terrific detonation. It came without warning. It rocked the cabin and made Big Dan sway to a jarring wall. The roof of the cabin came apart as its canvas split to ribbons.

"There goes your dynamite up at the pool!" choked Big Dan. "The Injuns has jumped the whole layout! Haystacks and everything been burnin' like mad!"

"How do you know?" gasped Kingman with one boot on.

"I seen the glare. Made an early start from town. Came into the valley at dawn. I seen the mountains light up 'way back of the valley. That meant Injuns at the pool. Couldn't be nothin' else!"

Kingman strapped on belt and six-shooter and grabbed a rifle from a corner. The two men tore out of the cabin and along the short ditch-line toward the northwest, where it ended at the Meyers property.

There had been a faint *pop-pop-pop* in the hills, but it seemed to die down. Now it started again, much nearer. A bullet whined down from above and flattened itself viciously against a rock. Then another came.

"The Injuns are scattered along the hills," observed Kingman. "We can't get to the pool."

"Where'll we go?"

"Behind my house. Where the ditch-line ends. It's the future outlet. I banked up the dirt in a big square. It's a natural fort. We can hold 'em off for hours."

More bullets came. One struck Kingman's cabin with a loud thwack. In the eery light of dawn, with black shadows thrown by every bush and rock which faced the tiny streak of sunlight beyond the eastern hills, it was hard to tell where enemies were ambushed. The prospector and the teamster-boss streaked for the trench.

"Look!" said Big Dan. "There goes my hoss!"

Down toward the valley they could see the dark blur racing like a scared rabbit. The mighty explosion had knocked every sane thought out of its head.

"Now we're stuck!" said Kingman grimly.

He owned no horse except for a Cavalier animal kept at the pool.

"Stuck it is!" agreed Big Dan, tumbling into the ditch outlet with its high banks and thick dirt. "Oh, well! I've seen wuss than this. Lots wuss!"

And the big brute calmly poked his head

over the trench-top, looking for something to shoot at.

DOWN below in the valley there was firing, as Kingman soon observed. The Rogers tribe, half-clad but dauntless, was mobilizing behind wagons and water-barrels, with Tom Rogers giving orders. His trousers were only held up by a hand and his galluses streamed along behind him, but he valiantly stood at the head of his brood and blazed away with a six-shooter whenever he saw anything to blaze at.

Alongside Rogers the husky Molly faced the lurking enemy as bravely as her father. She didn't wring hands or cry. She didn't even load guns. The youngsters did the loading. She stood behind a water-barrel and sighted her rifle as calmly as any veteran Indian-fighter in the land.

"Nervy!" remarked Kingman with admiration.

"You bet!" grunted McClusky.

"I wonder if we could get 'em up here?"

"No chance. There's Injuns between them and us. See 'em?"

Two or three braves, scattered far apart and hiding behind brush and tiny indents in the ground, were trying to worm their way upon the Rogers crowd, but without much luck. The larger body of redskins seemed to be up in the hills above Kingman and McClusky. Sometimes the two men saw movements behind some brush and fired madly. No one knew whether the redskins were hit or not.

"This here's a fool outbreak!" snorted Big Dan through the smoke. "What do them Injuns aim to git out of it?"

"Nothing. I guess they're just sore against white folks."

"They're sore, all right, but what do they want to shoot at people for? I reckon they've went crazy. Look! Up ahead!"

Kingman gazed along the ditch-line. A white man was running toward them frantically. The man was nearly naked. His clothes were in shreds, as if the explosion had almost blown them apart.

Kingman waved. In a minute the man was inside the trench, followed by one or two desultory bullets. He was recognized as one of Cavalier's wagon-drivers.

"The Injuns is comin' this way!" he panted. "They jumped the freight-station up at the pool and blew 'er galley west! Now they're a-hootin down the ditch-line!"

"They're here already!"

"Nope. This is only the advance scouts. There's two-three dozen more on the way!"

"What's got into them Injuns?" demanded McClusky. "They've been away from the res'vation for weeks and didn't do nothin'. Now they've went plum hostile to everybody. How did this here ruction start?"

"Oh, that was Phillips, your teamster. He started it."

"My teamster!" raved McClusky. "Wow! My men! They're at it again!"

"Yep. He was stayin' at the pool for the night. The Injuns blew in before dawn and wanted a hand-out. Lobo led 'em. We gave 'em a little grub because their ribs was stickin' out. We thought they'd go away, but they found some whisky in your wagon. Phillips said they could have it if they paid for it.

"We was all a little skeered of the Injuns, but Phillips talked to 'em rough. Lobo kept sayin' he was a heap big warrior and heap bad medicine. Phillips said he was a —— little rat that was likely to get a swift kick if he didn't shut up. Lobo told his gang to grab the liquor. Phillips tried to get in the way. That started it.

"Bimeby we run up a little hillside with the Injuns poppin' at us and crawlin' around toward our side. Then they all disappeared. Vanished. Then came the big bang. They'd touched off every stick o' dynamite at the pool. Before that they'd set fire to the haystack."

"Where's Phillips?" demanded McClusky.

"Heaven, mebbe. He was pretty near the explosion. He'd gone down to see what happened to the Injuns."

"How about the liquor?"

"It's inside the Injuns. That's why they're all rampagin'."

"Look!" cried Kingman. "Up ahead, along the ditch-line! Somebody's coming!"

It was Meyers, in shirt and trousers, with bare feet paddling along for dear life. Some distance behind him were two redskins who stopped to fire. Their marksmanship was poor, but they spurred him onward.

"Where's Meyers' bodyguard?" wondered Kingman.

"Him?" said the Cavalier teamster. "Oh, he run up to the pool to see what it was all about. I reckon they got him. Mebbe Meyers was waitin' for him to come back. That's why Meyers is so late!"

The merchant approached rapidly. A stray bullet whipped into the ground fifty feet away from him. He sprang into the air with a yelp, then leaped to the edge of Kingman's ditch.

John Kingman deliberately aimed a cocked pistol at his head.

It was an amazing act. Meyers halted, with eyes bulging and mouth open. Big Dan McClusky stared. The Cavalier teamster started to intercede, but Kingman stopped him with a gesture. He knew what he was doing.

Trapped and tormented, given no mercy, victimized for months by a wily trick, he saw a chance to retrieve everything. To hold a fugitive beyond the ditch and refuse help was outside the code of the white man; but Kingman didn't intend to refuse help in the end. He only wanted to threaten to do so.

It looked like deliberate murder, but it wasn't. The Indians couldn't hit Meyers except by luck. They were too far away and too unsteady. But to make Meyers feel thoroughly unsafe Kingman ordered McClusky and the other man to crouch down below the parapet. They obeyed, but they looked insulted.

"*Gott!*" shrieked Meyers. "You keep me oud here?"

"Lie down, boys," said Kingman to the others. "Those bullets are getting pretty close!"

"Yow-w-w!" howled the frantic, trembling Meyers. "For der love of Heafen——"

"What will you give to get in?" demanded Kingman.

"It iss murder! You bargain now? No! No! No! No! No!"

"All right. Stay out. Take a walk back along the ditch. Go ahead. Good-by. Lie down closer, boys. Those bullets are coming nearer!"

It was partially true. The Indians were not so far away, and by sheer volume of fire they managed to whip a bullet or two just over the little trench. Kingman gave himself just ten seconds more to hold off Meyers. Then he must take the little rascal in. Kingman felt mean enough as it was. Meyers was chattering, gibbering and clawing with terror. Kingman could risk only one more chance.

"You'd better go somewhere else," he suggested with a lordly wave of his hand. "Plenty of room out there. Go ahead!"

"No!" screamed Meyers. "Led me in! I give anyding! Anyding!"

"Sell me your lands for five hundred?"

Commercial instincts were slow to die in Meyers. He gasped. Then he looked back. What he saw made his knees knock together.

"Yes—yes—yes—quick!"

Kingman and McClusky dragged him over the top while the other man fired away with a repeating rifle.

"You said five hundred was enough for this land," Kingman reminded him. "Here!" He tore a page out of a notebook and wrote out a terse bill of sale.

"Sign it. These men are witnesses. I'll get the cash when we're back in town."

Meyers grabbed the pencil, then reconsidered. He was safe in the trench now.

"No!" he yelled. "No! Der price iss not right!"

"All right! Get out of here!"

A bullet whistled over the trench. The frantic Meyers grabbed the arm of Big Dan, who was pulling trigger on a heavy six-shooter.

"Leggo my arm!" roared McClusky. "You've sp'iled my aim!"

"Help!" appealed Meyers. "You can not led him do it!"

"I'm mindin' my own business! Shut up! Lemme alone! I'm busy!"

"Sign or get out!" thundered Kingman.

Meyers signed, but his face showed its agony. Kingman was ashamed of his bullying tactics; thoroughly ashamed; but as he looked down on Sundown Valley, basking in the morning sunlight, he knew that even this was justified, for Sundown Valley would soon be an Eden forever.

In a few minutes Lobo and his main detachment hove into sight, some distance beyond the ditch-line, with pot-valiant warriors urging each other to deeds of bravery. Down below, the Rogers clan was holding out nobly, banging away at the few targets which showed themselves.

"Look!" yelled Kingman. "Back here, behind us!"

They had been watching the ground to the northward, where the Indians were coming. In the other direction, southward, was the curve of a hill which hid everything beyond it; but now above the noise of firing there came the clatter of many horses.

"Sojers!" cheered McClusky. "They've been here all the time!"

The troop was almost upon them. It went by like a cyclone, a blur of brown horses and blue uniforms, clattering along with Army revolvers raised on high and sabers bouncing with the motion of the horses. They swirled by on both sides of the ditch. Then came a fusillade from the revolvers. It sounded like firecrackers let off at once.

More troopers stormed around the corner. They spread over the hillside. Some of them danced down to the Rogers farm. It seemed hardly a minute before the hills were swarming with bluecoats, with two or three pistol-duels screened from general sight by dust and smoke.

Kingman and his three companions stood up and watched it all. As a battle it was puny. As a round-up it was splendid. Indian braves, valiant a few moments before, were running around in circles or putting up their hands in surrender. The job was finished in three minutes.

"The picnic's over for Lobo!" remarked Big Dan. "Look! They've bound his arms! I reckon he'll stay in jail for the rest of his doggoned life!"

"Maybe others will be put in jail!" remarked Meyers softly.

It came like a thunderbolt. The canny little merchant had been a silent, scared spectator; but now he was getting his nerve back.

"Then you'll not stand by that bill of sale?" asked Kingman.

"It was made while I was under threats."

"What are you goin' to do about it?"

"I have my rights! There are courts in Arizona, no?"

"Sure there are!" bellowed Big Dan. "Let's take it to court! Let's bring the whole story up to an Arizona jury! Try it! Me and this other feller are witnesses that the transfer was legal. I've been layin' for you, Meyers, ever since you done me out of some freight-bills! Now I'll help Kingman to beat you! Let's take everything to court—freight-bills and all!"

THE case never went to the courts. John Kingman won his right to the ditch-line and built it; but in the mean time many things had happened.

He took over Maryland Cavalier's store on time payments. He felt that he owed her two thousand dollars anyhow, and he hoped to pay this out of legitimate earnings. It took time, but in the end he did it.

Then there was the day when Maryland left on the stage, never to return. The gaunt desert hobo, still looking as if he needed a shave, bade her farewell in the little office of the store. Even the dapper cavalry lieutenant had to wait outside.

The parting was brief and somewhat constrained; but the girl, free at last from an environment that was distasteful, gave this ungainly friend his due.

"I shall never forget you, John Kingman," she said.

That was all; but her eyes were kind as the poor awkward fellow dumbly wrung her hand.

Later he rode far behind the stage to Sundown Valley and across it; and he watched its dust in the far distance until it climbed into the hills and there was nothing to be seen except sky and mountains. Then he turned into the Rogers farmyard and silently unfastened the wire gate.

Inside the tiny home was a strapping, capable, big-hearted blonde who smiled when she saw him.

THEY raise wonderful peaches in Sundown now. Kingman's ranch is one of the finest in Arizona.

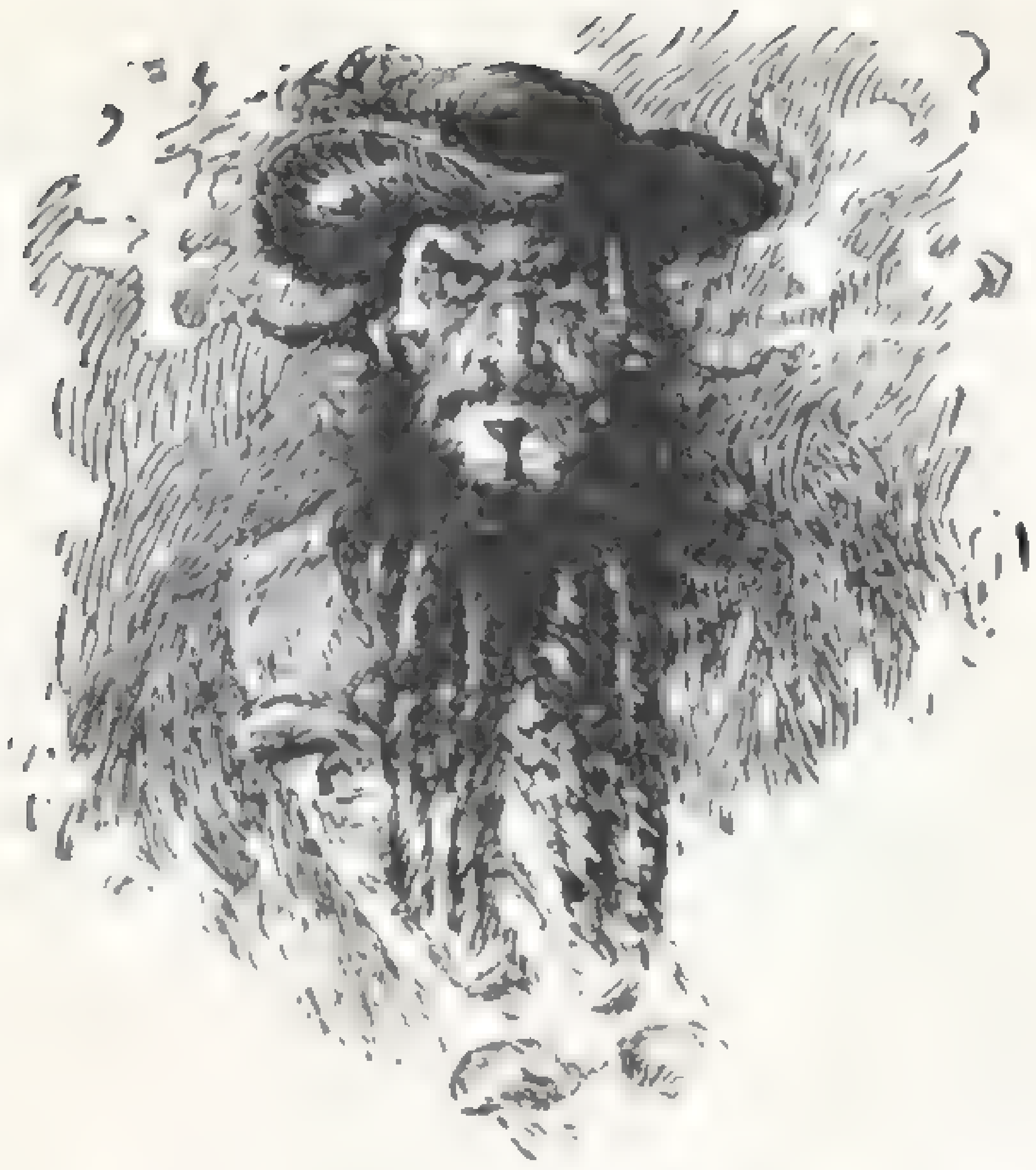
Dan McClusky, about eighty years old now, leers knowingly when he tells the tale in his costly but dissolute mansion up in Sundown, where he makes a specially vicious brand of home-made firewater out of every jar of Molly Kingman's preserved peaches that he can beg, borrow or steal.

Big Dan takes the credit for everything.

"If it wasn't for me hirin' crooked teamsters them Injuns wouldn't have got so much liquor," he explains in his boorish way. "If the Injuns hadn't been loaded, they wouldn't have got courage to go on the rampage. If they hadn't rampaged, Meyers wouldn't 've been skeered into sellin' that right-of-way for the ditch. If Meyers 'd kept that property he'd 've made 'em a real-estate scheme, and mebbe there wouldn't be a trickle of water in this valley yet.

"Meyers quit business a long time ago. I helped him out. I said I'd lick anybody that ever monkeyed with Sundown again.

"The real hero of this yarn, mister, is me!"



SEA HORROR

PIRATE TALES FROM THE LAW

BLACKBEARD

by Arthur M. Harris

Author of "Pirate Tales from the Law—Kidd," "Black Flag from Boston," etc.

IF YOU want to know a real pirate—a true terror of the seas—meet Mr. Blackbeard; called, in what could scarcely have been an innocent childhood, Edward Thatch, or Teach. Little Edward must have been suckled on brass filings and have cut his teeth on iron nails, for he grew up to be a consistently and completely hard-boiled proposition. Perhaps he fell when an infant and injured his head, or more probably was born with a twist to the bad; for no sane, normal man could have been so wild and wicked.

He, not Kidd, is the fellow you have in mind when you think of a pirate. He was the genuine plank-walking, marooning, swashbuckling boy of the seven seas; Bill Kidd and Jack Quelch, so far from being in his class, would barely have been tolerated by him as ordinary seamen under the "black flagg with a humane skelleton" which terrified the old-time mariners. To win his yellow-fanged grin of approval one would have to be absolutely, unreservedly inhuman.

Blackbeard! Folks got along with him best who addressed him with that pretty name. He had no use at all for "Mister Thatch"—plain Blackbeard to high and low, fore and aft; for his pride, his pleasure, his life were in his beard; an enormous bush, unusually, weirdly, wonderfully black; a huge mat of hair, really beginning at his ears, arching across his nose, and ending with his knees—a regular jungle from behind which his veined and boozy eyes peeped like those of a beast spotting its prey the while the long, leathery lips slavered with the thirst for blood. Nice-looking chap—very.

He might not take time to wash his nose—the only island of skin in that sea of hair—but no hour was too long or too tedious which was spent in curling, preening, pulling and twisting that beard into the most fantastic shapes and effects. One day he would swagger out on deck with his chin the axle for a half-dozen spokes of tightly rolled whiskers; another, it might be one great spike, thrust outward and upward in a unicorn symbol. Practically had a fashion for every mood, especially for the belligerent.

People had to keep out of his cabin then—when the skipper was trimming up his beard for a fight. Really he was the first patentee

IN TAKING these pirate tales from the law recourse has been had to the most authentic sources of the subject—the verbatim reports of the court proceedings in which the pirates here portrayed were prosecuted. So far as we are aware, this is the first popular presentation of the subject of piracy from this point of view. This derivation of these articles makes for the special informative value of the series. You have here the accounts of this picturesque class of sea-brigands as the activity of each has been determined by the examination of witnesses, the arguments of counsel, the instructions of judges and the verdicts of juries. In comparison with these records, the narratives of lay writers on the subject of piracy were frequently found to contain mistakes. Where collateral history has been consulted to necessarily supplement matters not concerned in the trials, the most authoritative has been sought. The technical trials themselves may be likened to maps; these stories to paintings faithfully following the maps.

of frightfulness. That was his specialty. When action threatened, those whiskers were wrought into an appearance of ferocity beyond depicting.

Nor was that all—he had other artistic touches in the nightmare line. For instance, there were those long, thin, slow-burning matches which he stuck all around his head, beneath his hat—alight they looked as if the inferno had vomited forth a demon—there were the three braces of pistols over his shoulders; the two dirks in his brilliant Caribbean sash, and the cutlas that never stammered. A gulp of raw Jamaica rum and he was ready to eat 'em alive.

How amiable an apparition to behold oozing up over your bulwarks some fine morning! No wonder the Atlantic, where it slaps the West Indian beaches on the one side and the shores of the Carolinas on the other, whispered his name with fear.

It was going to be a big job for the forces of law and order to snare this bird.

JANUARY, 1718, was the happy month for the Carolinas. Then it was that Blackbeard, coming from the West Indies by way of New England and the North Atlantic provinces, chose to make his hole at Ocracoke Inlet, on Pamlico Sound, North Carolina.

Not that Blackbeard came with his hat-matches lit and his beard glorious for strife, and his cutlas speaking sudden, certain death. Oh, my, no! Far indeed would this supposition be from the fact, for Blackbeard had come to Carolina to turn over a new leaf; to leave the wicked practises which had made him king of the wicked Indies; to forswear the black flag—generally to amend his way; particularly to take the Act.

"Taking the Act" was a joke beloved by all the best pirates. It was specially good after a profitable plunder cruise; useful, too, in a way, for it gave one a chance to spend one's salt-water money without having to fight somebody every five minutes. To take the Act was the only way a hard-working pirate could get a vacation.

The thing worked something like this: George the First, of England, at about this time was having trouble with the Swedes, and in consequence the British fleet was all tucked away up in the Baltic; he was troubled, too, by the merchants of London and the colonies, who were getting rather pert about this matter of pirate depredations.

Being completely at sea in more ways than one, the British Admiralty fell back to the old pardon business that they had tried in Captain Kidd's time, and which had been so successful that less than twenty years later the sorry scheme was dragged forth again.

Taking the technical peelings off, the meat of the matter was that if within a year from the date of the proclamation any pirate should surrender himself to any one of the king's colonial governors and swear to renounce his criminal courses, all the past should be forgiven and forgotten. The weakness of the plan, of course, was that a man you could not catch would not care much about your pardon. And still another, that the word of a pirate could poorly compare with a bond.

But the boys liked this Act of Grace as it was called, and some had even been known to abide quite consistently with its terms. The leading men of the business, of course, could not be expected to take it too seriously.

Blackbeard wanted a little lay-off from years of steady grind. Then, too, it was January, with its season of new resolutions—why not start the year right?

They all talked it over coming along the Virginia coast—near where they had heard of the proclamation—and it kind of appealed to everybody. They grew solemn, serious, not a little drunk, and decided to break up. Here was a chance to wipe the slate clean and start all over again.

They anchored in Ocracoke Inlet and marched off to take the Act. Let us go with them.

LITHE chaps, aren't they? See how the muscles ripple and play under those bright silk shirts; how column-like the brown necks groove into the bulging shoulders; in the fine, perfect pink of condition every one; strong, you can easily see—strong everywhere, that is, except in the head. Weak, there, lamentably weak.

In the heart, too, for they are really bad, capable of all evil, for which their environment and early associations can extenuate but not exculpate them. In truth, these are the creatures of a dark age—these men believe in witches and fear to whistle aboard ship lest they blow up a tempest. Most of these fellows are Englishmen, with some Spaniards and Frenchmen, all caring little for international animosities, enfranchised in the Commonwealth of Crime. You can hear the outlandish burring of the Yorkshireman, the hissing z's of the West Englander, the pitch, too, of what is to become the Cockney whine of a little later day, tussling with a jargon made up of many languages, founded on English.

Notice, too, these negroes from Barbadoes and other islands of the Indies, children of slaves brought but lately from Africa for the plantations. These don't rate as seamen on even the pirate ships, but are menials whose big job is to keep continually at the pumps. Still, it seems all a great lark to them; see how they laugh, joke, leap around in unequaled vigor, till the great gold rings in their ears, the gold chains about their necks and the heavy metal bangles on their wrists jingle and rattle with their motions. This thing of jewelry is affected by white and black alike—and how they like those wide, many-hued sashes, and the silk stockings under their knee-length breeches!

So they roll, seaman fashion, singing and romping to the small frame house where reigns the servant of the Proprietors and the master of the colonists, his Excellency, Governor Eden. At their head goes that strangest of all the strange creatures of the sea, that powerful, ape-like figure swathed hideously in hair—today all curled in hundreds of ringlets smeared with pomatum—looking like a thing from a bad dream.

They bulge unafraid into the mansion; full weaponed and together, they fear nothing at sea or ashore. But nobody is of a mind to trifle with them; the folk here are used to seeing everything that is grotesque washed up by the sea; nay, these men have many acquaintances among the inhabitants, for not a few have shipped from these parts.

Governor Eden enters, portly in a London flowered-silk waistcoat, stylish French shoes and peruke, high-pointed and white-powdered. He gasps a little at the gang jammed into the room and glances sharply over at Tobias Knight, Secretary of the Province, who a moment ago was scratching with his quill pen an encouraging story of graft to the Proprietors at home, but who now is nervously pulling his sword more accessibly across his round fat knees. Neither he nor the governor had even seen anything quite like that in old Pall Mall, you know.

"Takin' the Act, y'honor," growls Blackbeard, leering at constituted authority.

"Aye," chorus, froglike, his bully boys.

The job is soon done. With upraised right hands one and all swear to leave off piracy. They come in children of the rope; they depart free and law-abiding men. It is very easy.

All leave, that is, save Blackbeard.

"I salvages ships, your honors," thunders this gentleman, spreading himself out on a chair so that his beard should flow in its glory like a blanket over his person, while all its fancy little curly-cues, ringlets and twists dance with every movement of his chin. "My real trade, your honors—ship salvager. Mebbe I'll have business here. Lost ships is what I go for and lost ships I finds.

"No need for a good ship to be lost while Blackbeard's around to take 'em home again. No occasion to leave a lost ship to drift around till them dirty seadogs of pirates mauls 'em over. Law says lost ships must be reported to the governor, and now I abide the law."

"How d'ye mean, captain?" says the governor. "D'ye pull 'em off the rocks?"

The audience chamber—if it may be so called—shakes with the visitor's laughing.

"Ye don't know rocks, your honor, beggin' pardon; rocks don't let nothing go oncet they get aholt. Deserted ships I picks up; ships with a little water in 'em don't always go down as fast as the master fears.

"There's where I comes in. I get a ship like that; I comes in to you. Says I, 'Your honor, I have salvaged a ship.' Says your honor, 'Accordin' to law I declares you to have salvage of her.' I sell her for a good price. Says I to me, 'The governor, his honor, works hard; he ought to have his wages.' Says I to you, 'Your honor will perhaps accept a little present.' 'Captain Blackbeard,' says you, 'have a jog of rum.' We all stands up and drinks the king's 'ealth."

Governor Eden claps his hands smartly, and the black servitor jumps in.

"Boy, bring the Madeira and glasses for three."

GOVERNOR EDEN, in his corrupt connivance with Blackbeard, was not representative of the public opinion of the Carolinas in 1718. The proprietary provinces—for these things were shortly before the revolution which placed them directly under the Crown—had become tired of pirates.

It's a long story, but of powerful interest. The short of the matter is that the Carolinas had fostered pirates for her own interest until in time they became a menace. From the middle of the sixteen-hundreds the Southern provinces had been the outfitting-grounds of a shoal of privateers who under royal commissions threshed the waters of the Spanish Main for Monsieur le Roy, as the French were called, or the Dons of Spain.

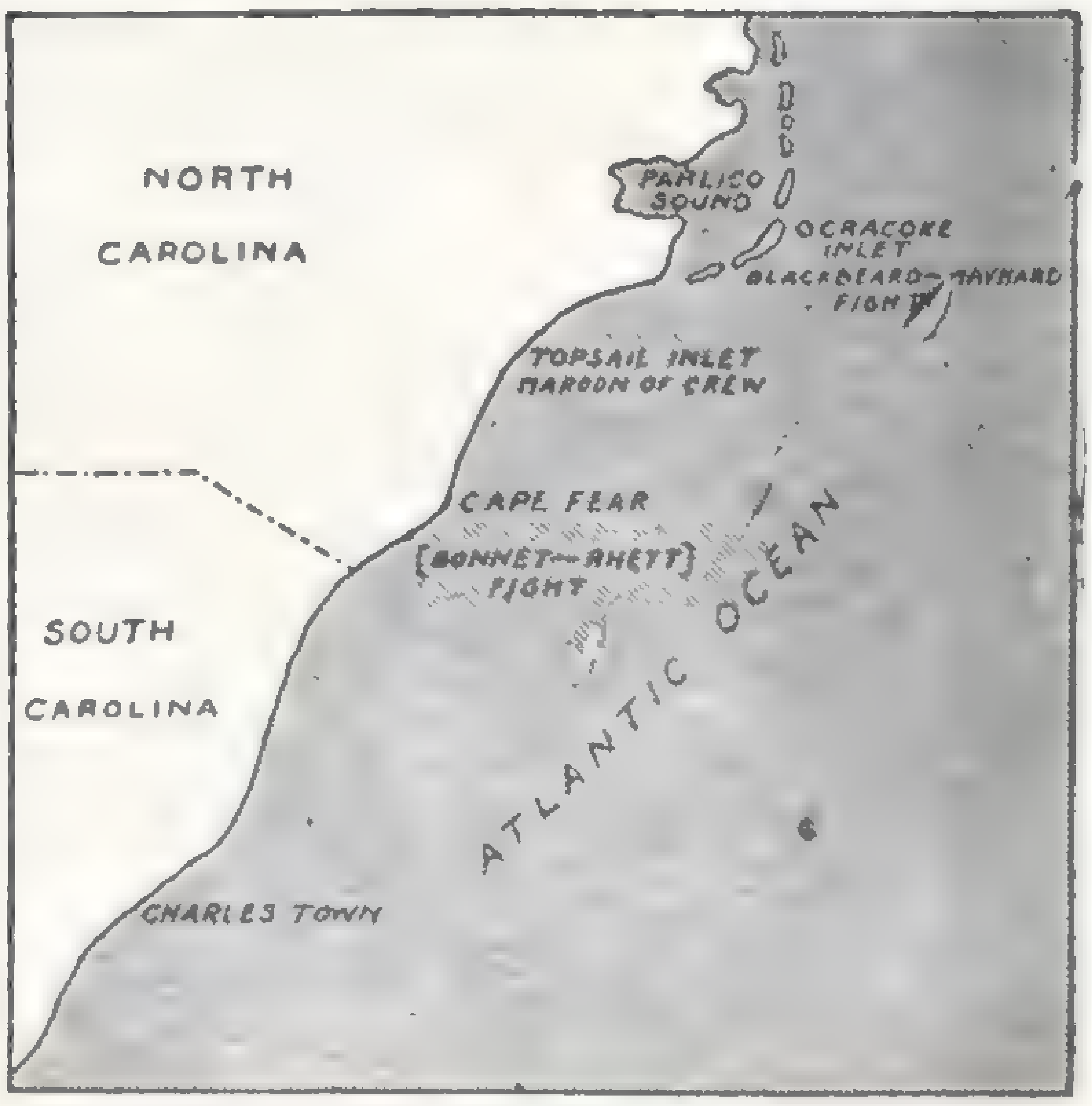
These letters-of-marque lads really protected the baby colonies from those two voracious wolves for quite a while, but naturally if business in the legitimate line of their letters slacked up, they were prone to mistake the ensign of St. George for that of the Fleur-de-lys, and thus kept their hands in practise by despoiling friends as well as foes. Far too often they crossed too easily the thin line which separated a privateer from a pirate, so that in something less than half a century Charles Town, which had trembled at the French and Spanish invasions, now was equally fearful of the guns of the erstwhile protectors, the pirates.

English navigation laws, which had delivered the provinces, bound hand and foot, into the hard fists of the English merchants, did not a little to promote piracy, for the sea robbers came to town with holds crammed full of all sorts of merchandise and peddled it to the colonists less the duties and imposts, and so made one of the cheapest markets in the world. Their customers all along the coast met them gladly and made no bones of the traffic, until the black flag threatened to monopolize the whole commerce, when the community awoke to the circumstance that there was a price in the cheap bazaar after all.

Consider that Blackbeard, a month or so before he took the Act of Grace, had "salvaged" no less than twenty-seven ships—nearly a ship a day—and you have a measure of the situation; add, too, this, that Blackbeard was but one of many, and you will understand why Jamaica, for instance, wailed to the home Government that it was ruined.

North and South Carolina had not formally divided at that time, though the distinction of names was used; Governor Eden ruled wickedly in the North; Governor Johnson ruled justly and wisely in the South.

THE vicinity where Blackbeard made his establishment was well chosen for his job. When one knew the channels between the low, sandy islands which lay all about the inlet one could run in and careen the ship, lay by and swagger alongshore, and when one got ready to abjure his oath and swing off on the plundering account again, one could intercept two lines of commerce—the coastwise from New England to the West Indies and the provinces, and that from the provinces to the North, to the West Indies and to the mother country. Blackbeard knew his business.



It should be explained that our whiskery hero was a sort of admiral, for he commanded not only his own ship, but he was attended by three auxiliary sloops, one of which—the *Revenge*—belonged to the peculiar and picturesque Major Stede Bonnet.

What did these ships look like? Well, the old British Navy had five classes of men-of-war, rated on the number of guns; Blackbeard's own ship, the attorney-general on a later occasion said, was equal to a fifth-class man-of-war; that is, he mounted forty guns, ranged on two decks, carrying a complement of some one hundred and forty or fifty men when his articles were full. She was about twenty feet in the beam and a little more than a hundred feet long; rigged with square sails, and capable of good speed.

The sloops, a general term for a variety of small ships, fought only ten guns, through the man-power was not proportionate, fifty or sixty men sometimes being crowded aboard. Shipbuilding was to wait generations for the start of the impetus which carried it to its culmination in the early nineteenth century.

Nobody knows just what turned Major Bonnet to pirating. Some say he had so much domestic misery that he simply felt he would have to chaw up something or somebody; others, that the works in his brains had slipped a little out of gear.

It could hardly have been money, for Bonnet was a well-to-do planter of Barbados, where his civic spirit had been so keen that he had earned the military title of major in service against the enemies of that colony. Perhaps he had been reading the *Diamond Dick* stories of that era, and was so fired by them as to forget his middle years, his decorous manners, his respectable standing, and crave for a taste of real life.

However that may have been, he bought a sloop, christened her romantically the *Revenge*, and, under the usual pretense of going privateering, picked up the right gang and put to sea in the late Summer of 1717. He knew nothing about the sea except that under certain circumstances it would drown one.

His crew were quick to see that their commander was no sailorman. His pretense at seamanship provoked their great-mouthed grins and deriding whispers and nods. He was driven to hide behind his mate, who really worked the ship; and to the end of his career, which lasted just about one year, he employed usually a sailing-master. But his courage, his hard temper, his resolution kept his feet on the quarterdeck and forced a respect that his land-lubberliness denied him.

That is, he wrung a deference from all but old Blackbeard. Bonnet fell in with him in August, 1717, and they made it up to sail together.

The bearded bear, however, soon saw that his partner was no skipper, and, growling and contemptuous, he summarily removed Bonnet from his own deck and articled him in an inferior position on Blackbeard's craft, putting one Richards, a bad egg but a good sailor, in Bonnet's place. This was a collar that galled the neck of Bonnet.

All the ships came in to Ocracoke about the same time; but Bonnet and a large number of men disdained to palter with the Act of Grace, and lay about the settlement waiting for Blackbeard to get over his whim and down to business.

The days ashore passed in debauch. Here the softer side of Blackbeard's character is shown in his affectionate devotion to fourteen wives—as he called them. With them he was most playful and kittenish. He loved to make these ladies laugh by blowing out the candles with his pistols; or sometimes, crossing his arms, a weapon in each hand, he would fire promiscuously about the room, whereupon the most merry play of hide-and-seek was enjoyed by all the company, wives and visitors alike, when those who could not get under the table quickly enough would catch bullets in the funniest places—like behind the ear or just above the heart. Everybody looked forward to these evenings.

SPRING came on Ocracoke, and the adventure sap stirred in Blackbeard's veins. He stood it until the end of May, then busted his oath in two, kicked the Act of Grace in the face, flung the skull and cross-bones to his masthead and sailed off for Charles Town, his minion sloops dancing and bobbing on the waves beside him. He was going shopping, if you please, for medical supplies, a great necessity by reason of his fleet's method of living and working. He was going to honor Charles Town with his patronage.

While this happy surprize for the little colonial seaport was coming around the sea-washed bulk of Cape Fear, a Mr. Wragg and a Mr. Marks, on board a merchantman, were slipping across the Charles Town bar, bound for England. Both were prominent local gentlemen, Mr. Wragg being nothing less than an assemblyman. There were several other passengers on the list, while in the ship's chest were seven thousand five hundred dollars in broad gold coins and pieces-of-eight.

Mr. Marks stood at the stern of the ship and looked a long time at the old town as it dropped away behind them.

"Neighbor Wragg," said he with a gently melancholic sigh, "it will be many a day before we tread the streets of Charles Town again."

Mr. Wragg squeezed his friend's hand sympathetically.

"Only a twelvemonth perhaps," he suggested. "Take courage, Marks."

They were both poor guessers. Instead of twelve months it was less than twelve days a good deal when Mr. Marks again looked his fellow-citizens in the eye and face-to-face. If somebody had told his fortune at cards that night he might have truthfully said that a dark man was coming across the water to see him.

"Do you see what I see?" asked the captain of the mate next day as the gray light of morning was turning all the waters to the look of molten slate. The mate gazed northward.

"I count four of 'em," he said slowly. "Looks like they're coming right for us."

They were. Very soon a shot whistled over the nightcap of Mr. Marks, who had thrust his head from his cabin with that sense of something amiss peculiar to shipboard.

"Heave back the tops'ls," growled the master.

The sails flatted down, and the ship came to. She was quickly circled by Blackbeard's fleet. The skull grinned amiably at them as the black flag stood out tautly in the wind. Somebody shouted something from the pirate ships; and the merchant captain ordered the boat lowered, and with two of the crew to row him set off for the marauding flagship.

"I've been pirated in these waters twenty times," grumbled the captain, steering with an oar, "so I know what they want."

The pirates wanted everything. They put a prize crew over on the captured brig. Mr. Marks was paged.

"Mistah Blackbeard's compliments, suh," grinned a big black fellow, looking coy in a hat made of a twisted red silk handkerchief, "and if you be Mistah Marks, suh, will you be so 'bliging as to step over to his ship."

Mr. Marks, with pallid face, looked pathetically at Mr. Wragg, whose sympathy was again subjected to a heavy sight draft.

"Why didn't he send for you, Wragg?" he complained unheroically. "You're a councilor—you've got the precedence."

Mr. Wragg patted him on the shoulder encouragingly.

"I'll advise your family, Marks, if anything happens," he said kindly; "but I'm sure it won't."

He felt pretty sure it would.

All stood in for Charles Town. Mr. Wragg once or twice thought he saw Mark's hand waving at him from Blackbeard's ship, where he and the merchant captain were detained. Or was it poor Mark's nightcap tossed in a dreadful struggle with the villains? Who could tell?

CAPTORS and captives lay at the bar; and Blackbeard sent the longboat off to town, carrying Mr. Marks under guard of one Richards and half a dozen nasty rascals. The astonishment of the town was unwordable when it saw the respectable Marks in company so dreadful.

But when they heard what Mr. Marks had to tell them their astonishment turned to fighting wrath. For Blackbeard ordered four hundred pounds' worth of medical supplies delivered to Richards or, first, Mr. Marks would be shot on the spot; second, Mr. Wragg's head and those of all the other passengers would arrive by the next boat; third, the pride of the province, Charles Town itself, would be blown from its foundations.

Governor Johnson was a strong man, and his council were strong men; but here was a puzzle for them. Sixteen years before this they had beaten off the French invaders with a courage that is notable in the history of municipalities; but now the gun was right straight at them, and it looked like hands up.

Things were stirring about in Blackbeard's fleet as well as in the town. Especially when two days went by and no word came over to the bar from Richards or Marks. On the evening of that day, Blackbeard, steeped in rum, lined his hostages along the deck and raved and thrust his awful beard into their faces and generally behaved in a most ungenteel manner.

"Shake your heads, my pretty landlubbers," he bellowed; "shake 'em while they're on your necks, for if Richards don't come back in the mornin' your heads will go to town at noon."

The wretched part of it was that the ruffian meant what he said.

A messenger came from Richards, however, in the morning, and so reprieved Mr. Wragg and his fellows for a few hours more. The messenger stated that in going from the bar to town the boat in which Marks was being taken capsized and there had been no end of trouble and delay in getting ashore. Further that the provincial council had been called together and were debating Blackbeard's proposition.

Another day or so of strain and another

silence from the town. Again Blackbeard stamped about and waved his cutlas and carried on as any obstreperous and brutal drunk might be apt to do. Oh, for a king's ship to happen along as chucker-out! But king's ships, like the night watch, are generally anywhere but where they're needed.

Blackbeard filed the frightened hostages forth again. This time he had the machinery of their destruction ready—a huge black, his great-muscled right arm bare to the shoulder, his hand hefting a bright cutlas. Blackbeard, perched on a keg of powder, beckoned to his captives in mocking solicitude.

"Step up, pretties," he leered, "and get your hair cut."

This was no opera, comic or otherwise. It was a situation to be met, and immediately. One whom history does not remember spoke up. "Cap'n Blackbeard," said he, talking for his life, "we've decided if you'll be so good as to let us, to join with you if you're going to take the town. We'll help you. They've betrayed us for a few pills and powders, so we owe them nothing."

"Spoke like a man," said Blackbeard. "You're proper men; you'll be real cocks of the old game. Heave the anchor and shot the guns—the tide will be right in an hour."

Perhaps this was not a heroic subterfuge; but let those judge who have been hostages, helpless in the hands of such a desperado. It saved the lives of a number of folk. For ere the tide lifted them over the bar the long-boat returned with Richards, the pirate boatmen and great piles of all sorts of medicines. The town had capitulated. There would come another day, it properly figured, and its wisdom was justified by the event.

Blackbeard left the merchant brig and its passengers rocking at the bar, but by an unfortunate oversight he sailed off with the ship's chest containing the gold coins and the pieces-of-eight.

PARTNERSHIP was dissolved soon after leaving Charles Town. Blackbeard had already apparently decided to abdicate the cocked hat of an admiral and assume the subordinate rank of a captain. He planned to concentrate his power in his one vessel.

So without concern he returned the dissatisfied Bonnet to the *Revenge* and recalled Richards and the hardiest members of the *Revenge's* personnel, leaving Bonnet with half a dozen hands of indifferent expertness to work the sloop.

That accounted for one of his three tenders. The second he resolved to abandon at Topsail Inlet, on his way to Ocracoke. This he effected in the regular Blackbeard fashion by ordering it driven ashore at Topsail Inlet and wrecked. Her crew might make what escape they could from the mess. They could not argue with the forty muzzles of his guns, so crack went the sloop's hull upon the rocks, while Blackbeard lay by and laughed at the men struggling in the surf.

These unfortunates at once went to work saving the sloop's food and powder, which hard labor was no sooner ended than Blackbeard stood in and the arch-pirate came ashore in the boat. He took all the salvaged stores and every first-class seaman among the men and left, leaving nearly a score of his late followers destitute and marooned on a wild and isolated beach. In this way Blackbeard paid for faithfulness.

The castaways had nothing to do but huddle about the sand and hope for help. It did not occur to them to go back into the wilderness behind them, perhaps because, as sailors, they would not trust themselves to any but their wonted environment, perhaps also for the reason that the unsettled interior promised them even scantier succor than the wide sea before them, on which a coastwise ship might possibly be attracted by their signals. So they lay around listening to the *creak-creak-creak* of the occasional seagull, the thumping and swirling of the inrushing waves and the cracking of the ship's gear and planking.

Before serious privation befel them, however, the hoped-for sail fluttered out of the horizon. They took the shirts from their backs and hopped vehemently up and down the beach and flew to the headlands in a frenzy of inarticulate appeal.

Joy unspeakable—they saw the topsails heaved back and the ship come to! Saved! The men massed at the very edge of the water and stared hard at the boat which now put off and came swinging in toward them.

"If it ain't Major Bonnet!"

There was a kind of pleasure in the way they said this as the boat's crew could be identified. They had never expected that the commander of the old *Revenge* could ever have looked so good to them. A dozen welcoming hands pulled at the bow of his boat when it grated on the sand.

"A dirty deal, boys," said the major; "a dirty deal to leave ye all like this—all governors of a maroon island."

That was a loved witticism of the major; marooning with him was always to be invested with the dignity of governor of the maroon sand-spit. He had quite a turn for pleasantry. He chuckled, and then got down to business.

"Getting to the point, my lads," he continued, "let us leave this outlaw life which has brought us nothing but grief. Come with me to St. Thomas in the Indies, and we'll get a privateering commission there against the Spanish dogs, and show 'em the kind of metal that is in a British cutlas."

He put a punch into his proposition by explaining, sympathetically but firmly, that if they refused his offer he would be quite obliged to sail away and leave them still in the governorship of Topsail Inlet.

Nobody wanted that distinction, and the marooned left in boatloads for Bonnet's ship. As they came under her bows they marked that the name *Revenge* had been painted out, and in its place were the words, *Royal James*, being the major's compliment to the Pretender and a vivid indication of the major's politics.

The tide crept in and washed the last heel-mold out of the sands of Topsail Inlet, where the gulls were left to peck speculatively at the protruding nails and tangled cordage of the battered ship, the while they wondered at the ways of that queer creature, Man.

COMMONS were lean on the *Royal James*. When the rescued pirates found that there was not very much to eat on the ship the first gush of joy at their deliverance sloughed off quickly.

"Ye see, men," Bonnet explained, "the pantry is pretty low. The first job of a sailorman is to eat, so we may have to stop somebody on our way to St. Thomas and beg a bite."

A very reasonable suggestion.

"Somebody" appeared before the cruise was very old. He showed no concern however to answer their hail but jammed up into the wind and sped away. That was certainly no proper sea courtesy.

To teach the rude fellows a lesson in manners, the *Royal James* swung behind and followed fast, and as pursuit was quite in her line she soon pulled down the fleeing traveler and with a shot across his bow brought him to with a bang. Bonnet shoved alongside and soon stuffed his hold and his men with quarters of beef and barrels of rum.

That was a fair start. All waist belts were comfortably tight; drooping corners of lips went up and the old zest for piracy swelled and rippled like a flood tide in the veins of the men of the *Royal James*. So when with a grin the captain sped the black flag up the lines the general contentment was not grievously shaken.

Two Bermuda-bound ships were pulled in the day following the first capture, and the day after that they picked up a fourth. The tally of takes now began to run up smartly. Inside of a week five ships were looted, from which a number of recruits were made, including negroes who were delegated to the pumps and the menial jobs with the status of slaves, and whose signs to the sloop's articles were not invited.

Here is a typical haul from one craft: Twenty-six hogsheads and three barrels of rum, valued at fifteen hundred dollars; twenty-five hogsheads of molasses, worth seven or eight hundred dollars; three barrels of sugar, value one hundred and fifty dollars; cotton, indigo, wire cable of varying values, a small amount of French and Spanish coins, one pair of silver buckles and one silver watch. Thus, you see, the boys cleaned up systematically from the hold to the captain's waistcoat pocket.

They peddled their merchandise alongshore, where the business, though more risky than in a happier day, was still keen. They grabbed vessels on the high seas or at anchor in way ports. One captured in the latter situation was the *Francis*, and here is her mate, Mr. Killing, who is anxious to tell us himself just how it all happened. Proceed, Mr. Killing.

"THE 31st of July (1718) between nine and ten of the clock, we came to an anchor about fourteen fathom of water. * * * In about half an hour's time I perceived something like a canoo: So they came nearer. I said, here is a canoo a-coming; I wish they be friends. I haled them and asked them whence they came? They said captain Thomas Richards from St. Thomas's. * * *

"They asked me from whence we came? I told them from Antegoa. They said we were welcome." (Pirates certainly loved their little joke!) "I said they were welcome, as far as I knew." (—which you observe was not very far. A man of careful statement, this Mr. Killing.) "So I ordered the men to hand down a rope to them. So soon as they came on board they clapped their hands to their cutlases; and I said we are taken. So they cursed and swore for a light. I ordered our people to get a light as soon as possible. * * *

"When they came into the cabin the first thing they begun with was the pineapples, which they cut down with their cutlases. They asked me if I would not come and eat along with them? I told them I had but little stomach to eat. They asked me why I looked so melancholy? I told them I looked as well as I could—" (Before we smile at the worthy mate let us wonder a moment how we would have looked in the same fix.)

"They asked me what liquor I had on board. I told them some rum and sugar. So they made bowls of punch and went to drinking the Pretender's health, and hoped to see him king of the English nation—" (This was doubtless the result of Major Bonnet's treasonable propaganda. Here was an incipient navy for the Pretender had he only known it.) "They then sung a song or two. The next morning * * * they hoisted out several hogheads of molasses and several hogsheads of rum. In the after part of the day two of Bonnet's men were ordered to the mast to be whipt. * * *

"Then Robert Tucker came to me, and told me I must go along with them. I told him I was not fit for their turn, neither were my inclinations that way. After that Major Bonnet himself came to me, and told me I must either go on a maroon shore" (no doubt with his usual little jest about the governorship) "or go along with them, for he designed to take the sloop (*Francis*) with him.

"That evening between eight and nine we were ordered to set sail, but whither I knew not. So we sailed out that night, and I being weary with fatigue, went to sleep; and whether it was with a design or not I can not tell, but we fell to leeward of the *Revenge* (*Royal James*); and in the morning Major Bonnet took the speaking trumpet, and told us if we did not keep closer he would fire in upon us and sink us. So then we proceeded on our voyage till we came to Cape Fear."

Thank you, Mr. Mate; you have given us an interesting and living picture of just how these wretches went about their dirty work.

CAPE FEAR! When a "naval historian" tells us that the battle at Cape Fear was merely a matter of a few shots and a surrender he not only understates the fact, but beclouds the due glory of a company of heroic men. Mr. S. C. Hughson, whose patient accuracy has given the complete story to the world, not only describes a serious engagement but shows that the result was so open a question that the pirates, during the fight, beckoned with their hats to their opponents in mock invitation to board and take them, in full confidence of victory.

Cape Fear is on Smith Island, at the mouth of the Cape Fear River, on the coast of North Carolina, and between Charleston and Ocracoke Inlet. At New Inlet, where the river swims into the sea, it divides what are now called Brunswick and Hanover Counties. Shoal waters and sandy islets make the work of navigation here uncertain.

Major Bonnet had made his sea-nest in this region, his knowledge of the channels and depths protecting his comings and goings. In this place he could repair and refit his ship as well as set up a sort of market for the purveying to the local folk his varied plunder. For the coastwise pirate, as distinguished from the pirate of the Kidd and Quelch school, was simply a smuggler who stole his wares, and if you hyphenate him thus, smuggler-pirate, you can separate him from the typical smuggler who acquires his contraband lawfully in a cheaper market to run it past the customs to a dearer market.

It was to Cape Fear, then, that Bonnet came in the beginning of August with his ship and two captive sloops, one of them being the *Francis*, and it was here that toward the end of the next month Justice presented her bill to him at the point of a cannon.

Colonel Rhett, of Charlestown, was the agent of Justice in this instance. Not long after Blackbeard had held up Charles Town for a quantity of pills and plasters, as we have noticed, another rascal tried the same trick but could not make it work. This fellow's name was Vane, sometimes called Vaughan, and quite a bad actor in his own way.

Of all the citizens who sharply resented these piratical impertinences, Colonel Rhett, a noted colonist, took it most to heart. On his own initiative he fitted out as sloops-of-war two ships, the *Henry*, on which he himself sailed, and the *Sea Nymph*, which he manned with many "gentlemen of the town, animated with the same principle of zeal and honour for our public safety, and the preservation of our trade."

Heartily seconded by Governor Johnson of South Carolina, who unlike Governor Eden of North Carolina was a terror to pirates, Rhett's little fleet put out in pursuit of Vane; for Vane, seeing that his plans had slipped, decided that he had better also slip. He slipped so effectively that Rhett never came up with him.

Since leaving Topsail Inlet with his recruits Bonnet had taken no less than thirteen vessels, and word of this pirate had come to Charles Town while Rhett was outfitting. Missing Vane, Rhett "and the rest of the gentlemen were resolved not to return without doing some service to their country, and therefore went in quest of a pirate they had heard lay at Cape Fear." There they certainly found their opportunity of doing a public service and most commendably appropriated that opportunity.

At evening on September 26 the *Henry* and the *Sea Nymph* came to Smith Island while daylight enough was left to show them the topmasts of the pirate above a spit of land behind which the *Royal James* lay. They threw their anchors into the mud of the inlet and waited for morning. At dusk three boatloads of armed men came out of the river and coolly reconnoitered. Major Bonnet had spotted Colonel Rhett.

All that night of late Summer the Charles Town gentlemen could make out the threats and persuasions of Bonnet and his officers driving on the efforts of their crew in making ready for the morrow's deadly debate, which Bonnet, rather than surrendering, evidently chose to maintain. The tide brimmed up the river from the Atlantic and was sucked back again to those vast waters, yet it lulled no one to sleep on any of the ships.

All night the wind-blown torches and lanterns lit the work of the pirates; all night the glare of them flickered and jumped beyond the bump of land which separated the besiegers and the besieged. The pirate sloop was like a warrior unbuckled and relaxing in his tent, expecting no hostile surprize. Her deck was disorderly with bits of cargo; barrels of rum, quarters of beef, hogsheads of molasses, all to be cleared off for the free action of the guns. Her gear, too, was probably at odds and ends in course of repair.

The work of weeks had now to be punched up into the fleet hours of one night, for when the dawn should come the *Royal James* must be a warrior harnessed and prepared. All night the men of the *Henry* and the *Sea Nymph* lay at watch.

Sun-up began the day of fate. Beyond the headlands which sheer above the river, the east was bannered with yellow and purple and rose-pink; a strong breeze blew directly from the land. The sails of the *Royal James* went up with the sun, the blocks and tackle creaking like a flock of hungry gulls; the chains rattled with the hoisting of the anchor.

Bonnet had to fight two to one. His chance—and it was an approved method of pirate strategy—was to get to open water and battle on the run, broadsiding one or the other of his enemies but never permitting both to get at him at once.

The major had become quite a sailor now. He gathered all his men on the *Royal James* and left the two captured sloops with only Mr. Killing and the other prisoners on board of them. The refusal of these latter to aid him in his fight with Rhett was allowed to pass without punishment.

"Here they come!"

Beyond the hummock the Charles Town men could see the masts of the pirate, fully freighted with sail, running swiftly toward the point. Bonnet was making a break for the sea.

Rhett's ships quivered with action. As the *Royal James* thrust her bowsprit into sight, the *Henry* and the *Sea Nymph* crowded down on either of her quarters.

They made it in time; Bonnet, dodging, was elbowed into the shore. If the channel had been deep there he might still have made it; but the channel was shallow, and his ship thudded into the sandy bottom, and there she lay, with her full suit of canvas tugging at the sticks until they promised to snap.

Rhett grinned and swung about, but he could not make it sharply enough, and his satisfaction waned with the bump of his ship into the same bottom that gripped his enemy. The *Sea Nymph*, also turning, likewise found herself hard and fast ashore.

Here then was the situation. The *Henry* was grounded on the pirate's bow within pistol-shot; the *Sea Nymph* struck the sand out of range, and there she stayed for the greater part of the fight, a spectator of the struggle, unable to bear a part or give any help to the *Henry*.

And Rhett's flagship needed help. When she hit she slanted, but in the same direction as the pirate had tilted, with the result, of course, that she presented her unprotected deck squarely to Bonnet's broadsides, while the latter's position offered more of his hull and less of his deck to Rhett's ordnance.

For all of that, the South Carolinians gave the Barbados gentleman all their ten guns at once with a smart peppering of small-arm fire. Bonnet roared back with all of his pieces, smashing the *Henry's* deckwork and reddening her scuppers. The Charles Town boys who stood by the guns on that open, inclined deck of that Saturday morning, never letting the fight flag for a moment, certainly passed the supreme physical test one hundred per cent. to the good.

But there was to be another deciding element of the contest than cannon-balls, musketry or cutlases. The tide, which was now turning and flooding in, would award the victory. For whichever ship righted herself first must have the critical advantage.

The opponents must have known this from the first, and, of course, the benefit of the tide being uncertain, each desperately strove to finish the other and thus leave no chance to the arbitrament of Nature. The mud flats disappeared beneath the oncoming waters; the lower islands sank from sight; the battling ships jerked now and then with the powerful tug of the stream at their hulls, and with the rising of the river crammed more shot into the hot guns till the smoke burned the eyelids of the fighters red, and ten good men lay in the shocked attitudes of death on the *Henry's* decks, and eighteen wounded groaned in her hold. Seven of Bonnet's crew had signed on with the real skull-and-bones flag.

The tide came swirling in. High noon gave place to afternoon—the moment of decision was at hand. One or other of the ships would gain her keel in a few minutes. Which would it be?

It was the *Henry*. Bonnet, who had fought supremely, saw with vehement despair the yards of his enemy tilting up, while he himself lay in the sand inert and helpless. He rushed with his pistol cocked to the magazine of powder thus to make the grand finish, but his men threw themselves upon him to restrain his rash and horrible act, while one of them jumped in the shrouds and waved the white flag of the conquered.

Rhett boarded and chained up some thirty men, including their leader, and after repairing the *Henry* set out for home. The public service had been rendered—by the tide.

CHARLES TOWN went wild with excitement, though not exactly in the way they mean who keep this tired phrase in currency. When Rhett came in laden with pirate prisoners and convoying the *Royal James* and the two sloops captured by that ship, the *Fortune* and the *Francis*, he was the hero of one faction in town and the villain of the other.

Friends of piracy in general and the personal acquaintances of the enchained pirates in particular shared a common indignation. They must have been numerous, for they promised to liberate the prisoners or burn the city to the foundation blocks. Bonnet, as was fitting for a gentleman who happened to be a criminal, was locked up in the residence of the marshal, while the baser fellows were thrown into the watch-house, there being no jail in the town at that time.

The fashion of the port went out to look at the ships. The *Henry* was all knocked about, while the *Royal James*—whose name had been immediately changed back to *Revenge* by a proper patriotic gesture—had not much more than a chipped hull.

If the ships had not grounded as they did Bonnet would have been against overwhelming odds. The *Henry* had eight guns and seventy men; the *Sea Nymph* had the same number of cannon and sixty men. Bonnet fought with ten guns and about fifty men.

But the sticking of the ships had made his chance more even, for in that situation he commanded two more guns than did Rhett, and the latter's slight excess of men was more than canceled by the bad slant of his deck, with its consequent openness to the enemy's cannonade.

Before the trouble in town could blaze into tumult, the pirates were put to trial in the Vice-Admiralty Court, presided over by Judge Trott. Bonnet, however, did not stand among them—by bribing with a free palm he had escaped and was at that moment fleeing up the coast in a small boat, to the great scandal of all lovers of good government.

The trial was brief and characteristic of the times. The defendants, without counsel as was usual, feebly pleaded that Bonnet had deceived them at Topsail Inlet into sailing with him. Ignatius Pell, boatswain of the *Royal James*, turned state's evidence, and other witnesses were Mr. Killing, whom we have quoted, and the captain of the *Francis* and the captain of the *Fortune*.

There could not be a doubt of their guilt and in that age not a doubt of their fate; they were sentenced to be hanged by a judge who preached at and denounced them in the vigorous fashion of the Elizabethan courts. In less than one week all but three or four who had proved compulsory service were executed at old White Point, near the present beautiful promenade.

One cheerful ray lightened the black misery of their situation—Stede Bonnet was recaptured. "He was the great ringleader of them," said the prosecuting attorney, "who has seduced many poor, ignorant men to follow his course of living, and ruined many poor wretches; some of whom lately suffered, who with their last breath expressed a great satisfaction at the prisoner's (Bonnet) being apprehended, and charged the ruin of themselves and loss of their lives entirely upon him."

COLONEL RHETT had again been the fate of Major Bonnet. After Bonnet's flight from the marshal's home, Rhett went after him and ran him down on a little island near the city. Heriot, sometime shipmaster for the major, was shot in the short scrimmage, and his employer again brought to Charles Town in manacles.

They tried Stede Bonnet in the same court and the same fashion and with the same evidence as they had his crew. He was tried on two indictments, one for taking the *Francis* and the other for taking the *Fortune*.

To both he pleaded not guilty and was first tried on the affair of the *Francis*. He stood up for himself in good shape; but the facts, as well as the court, crushed him. He claimed, as Captain Kidd had claimed some years before in a similar fix, that a mutinous crew drove him protesting into these criminal courses. He explained that the only piracy he had ever been in was when with Captain Thatch. One wonders how much the mutinous crew, as alleged, had to exert themselves to persuade an old Blackbeard man to steal a fat ship or two.

A curious little circumstance comes up in this trial. Pell, the boatswain, in answer to a question said Bonnet was in command of the ship, "but the quartermaster had more power than he," adding that the quartermaster took charge of the loot and sometimes divided it. One wonders if the crew did not have a great deal more to say about things than would be supposed, tolerating Bonnet as a business manager and general executive.

Bonnet might have come down as a somewhat romantic person—but the nerve he had always shown, even in his trial, broke at the last; and when on December 18 he was hanged in the same place as his followers had been, he was nearly senseless from fear. Thus in a miserable huddle he left a stage on which he had not been too modest, on which he had even swaggered.

This is all the story of one Summer. The blockade of Charles Town by Blackbeard had happened in May of 1718, and December of the same year saw the end of Stede Bonnet. And to Bonnet, as to his men, there came a spark of joy before he went to the rope—and that was the news that his old superior, Blackbeard, had died upon the cutlas on November 22.

AFTER breaking up his fleet, leaving some of it stranded, as we have seen, on Topsail Inlet, Blackbeard came back to Ocracoke and a lazy Summer. He seems to have just lain about, spending his money and doubtless roystering with Secretary Toby Knight, at whose house he found the welcome mat on the threshold.

But the gold pieces that he sent spinning dwindled; that and the ennui of a seemingly respectable life put him to sea again. He gave out that he was going on a "commercial venture" and even registered his ship at the customs house. In a few weeks he was back again with a very fine French ship in excellent condition, which he explained with a solemn face he had "salvaged," and for which he put in the proper claim of a salvor.

Nobody was deceived by the miscreant, nor seemed surprized that this should be the event of the adventure in peaceful commerce that he had so carefully advertised. Not only did Eden give him a certificate of salvage, but Toby Knight kindly allowed Blackbeard to store the Knight barn with the Frenchman's cargo.

North Carolina—long-suffering but at the end of her endurance—flamed up, and, ignoring its governor, sent to Alexander Spotswood, Governor of Virginia, a call for succor from the ravages of the pest of Ocracoke Inlet. Virginia heard and responded and despatched Captain Brand and Lieutenant Maynard, each in command of a small ship of war, to the Carolina coast in quest of Blackbeard.

Brand and Maynard appreciated the size of their job, so they gathered into their crews picked men who were volunteering for the duty, and who would be likely to keep the same zestful lookout for the oncoming [terror as does a whaler in fat and profitable fishing-grounds for the dark bulk which shall fill all his barrels with oil.

They reached Pamlico Sound, of which Ocracoke Inlet is a part, toward the evening of November 21, and with jumping pulses spotted the masts of the black beast as he lay in wait for prey. Blackbeard was surprized just as Bonnet had been, and like Bonnet spent the night in getting ready for battle.

The Virginians had to lie outside the inlet all night and wait for the morning to light them through the risky channels. When next day they sailed in, Blackbeard, knowing the soundings, was able to make the running fight pirate tactics prescribed for such emergencies, and blasted Brand and Maynard with his broadsides; and though steeped to the eye-brows in rum, he was at all times the adept and finished sailor.

But the enemy were getting at him, too, and his decks were cluttered with the slain. He was undermanned, having only some twenty men at the time, so that his losses from the attackers' fire left him but a sparse crew to work his ship and man eight guns, as well as keep going an effective musketry volleying. There was left but one resource, and that was hand-to-hand conflict.

He got within grappling distance of Maynard's ship, and with his usual ferocity of appearance and manner threw himself and his surviving men into the Virginian's rigging, and plunged, demoniacally fighting, to the decks. For a second the pirates shook their enemy with the shock of the impact, but not long—with that roaring vigor which gave the English-speaking sailors their dominion of the oceans of the world, Maynard's men rallied and an indescribable butchering ensued.

Blackbeard made for the commander, and Maynard met him with equal courage and the added strength which the moral side of the matter always lends a warrior's arm. The arch-pirate's body was open at more than twenty places; but on those heaving, blood-wet decks he fought the lieutenant with the verve of an athlete fresh for the field. A sudden chance and he thrust a cocked pistol straight into his opponent's chest, but before the finger could pull the trigger back, Maynard laid the cutlas squarely across the pirate's throat. He sank to the deck like a slaughtered bull.

It was all over. Those pirates who could, leaped over the bulwarks and swam to the shore, leaving a red trail in the water behind them.

Twilight came down on the sea. Beneath the shallow waters the bodies of the slain quivered with the motion of the waves as if they were still alive and still struggling, and among them was the headless corpse of Blackbeard.

For that terrible head was hung at the bowsprit of Maynard's ship. All the way back to Virginia the gruesome figure-head swung and dipped and ducked with the movements of the vessel; the ocean pounded and played with it and twisted that strange beard into more fantastic shapes than Blackbeard had ever dreamed of, weaving into it the weeds and slime-flora of the sea, and for a last touch washed from their sockets the baleful eyes which glared in the fixed glassiness of death.

THE BLACK CHANNEL

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by Max Bonter

Author of "The Cushions," "Black Charlie's Towline," etc.

PADDY O'GORMAN spat upon the broad callus that sheathed the palm of his huge right hand. He drove his pick-point through eight inches of tough clay. His ruddy, usually good-natured features just then were set in a half-frown of remonstrance. He had been arguing with his foreman, Dan O'Hara.

"Faith now, Dan," he resumed with persistence, "whin ye pick up the payces iv a mon an' plant thim in a grrave on Fools' Hill, ye know thot's the ind iv him till he shakes hands wid the divil or binds the knee in frront iv howly Saint Peether. But whin a mon picks an' shoovels wan day wid his mates, or dhrinks whisky wid thim in the tigerr—an' the nixt day he's shthrangely missin' from the camp, an' ye niver see him anny more—thin phwat arre ye to think, begorra?"

Big Dan O'Hara drew his pipe from his mouth and spat importantly upon the grade. His eyes traveled complacently over his gang of "white min," as he called them, while they labored with pick and shovel on the right-of-way. Big Dan was rather proud of this gang, composed chiefly of Irishmen, cockneys, Glasgow Scotch and American hoboes—the only gang in the camp that was properly representative of Anglo-Saxondom.

"Sure, now, Paddy," he returned sagely, "thim Rooshuns' throubles arre no consarn iv a white mon like ye. Lave thim be, an' attind to your own affairs."

Pick, pick, pick. Great lumps of clay detached themselves from their bed and tumbled over one another beneath the young Irishman's powerful strokes of the heavy tool. A flicker of resentment came into Paddy's blue eyes.

" 'Tis the consarn iv all the white min in thish counthry," he protested doggedly. "An' I tell ye, O'Hara, thot so long as thim furriners do be behavin' thimsilves, 'tis the white min thot ought to see thot they get a squarre dale."

O'Hara spat again, clearing his throat ostentatiously while preparing to rebuke the outspoken young shovelman. But his suddenly uplifted voice bawled a stentorian command instead:

"Kape thim picks thoompin', min! Here comes the gineral forrmon!"

Cronkhite came riding along the right-of-way astride his big sorrel mount. The man was big, square-jawed, powerful—the type of boss who expects a subordinate to quail before his eyes. His cheeks were bathed in a continual flush. His dark eyes seemed to be always filmy—often bloodshot.

He rode indifferently past Big Dan and the grading gang, responding to the foreman's respectful salutation with a surly nod. A few hundred yards farther northward he left the right-of-way and viciously spurred his horse up a rocky trail that swung away to the right and wound around the southern base of a huge ridge of granite. The men of the gang paused a moment to straighten their backs and wipe the sweat out of their eyes. O'Gorman looked at O'Hara.

"The Black Channel," copyright, 1923, by Max Bonter.

"Belike 'tis the dooty iv a gineral forrmon to get dhrunk and shtay dhrunk as an ixomple to the rist iv the min," he ventured scathingly.

"Ye'd show more rispict for your betters if ye'd kape thot pick thoompin'," retorted Big Dan icily. "Gettin' dhrunk is ivery mon's prrivilege whin he pays for thot same."

Paddy liked exceedingly to argue with his touchy foreman, who clung to the belief that an all-wise Creator had divided mankind into three distinct groups—bosses, white men and foreigners. But notwithstanding these periodic disagreements, O'Hara liked his bluff young countryman who always espoused the cause of the under dog and whose knotty hands and strong back could pick and shovel as much as any two men in the gang.

The Barren Ridge Depot camp housed about three hundred men all told—three hundred brawny slaves of industry of at least a dozen nationalities; blasting, digging, trestling a bed for a great transcontinental railroad of which the nearest laid steel was still over a hundred miles to the east. They were a polyglot battalion of human ants campaigning against the forces of the wilderness, spouting as many tongues as balked the erection of Babel, but organized against discord by hard-headed engineers and hard-fisted foremen who in turn had been organized into a slave-driving unit by them that smoked perfectos in swivel chairs.

Just at that time a strange uneasiness was current in the big camp. Within six months four of the Russian workers had mysteriously disappeared. Without exception they had been steady men—long-timers on the job. One of them had not missed a single day's labor since the opening of the camp. Report had it that these men had drawn their money and returned to Russia.

On the surface this explanation appeared to be quite plausible; but on the other hand it was very strange that all four had departed in secrecy without even bidding their fellow laborers good-by or confiding to their own countrymen the fact that they intended returning to the home land. Usually the procedure adopted by returning foreigners was vastly different—they gathered for protection into a crowd and the trip was planned and discussed weeks in advance.

Tragedy was far from being a stranger in the big camp. Just outside the boundaries there was a little cemetery called "Fools' Hill," where pieces of men were buried—pieces of men who had persistently opened cans of black powder with axes; pieces of men in whom familiarity with dynamite had at last bred contempt. Also, among the score of those implanted piecemeal there, were one or two men who had merely died—just died whole and been buried whole, but who, according to the sentiment of the time and place, were nevertheless likewise fools to have so inexcusably passed away, leaving their toil money still unspent.

These whole and those piecemeal—well, at any rate there was tangible evidence that *they* were *there*, sleeping their last long sleep. Crude little crosses fashioned of dynamite-box slats wrote Omega after their lives in a language that all men of all nations, illiterates included, could understand.

But for men suddenly to *disappear*, leaving no trace? Ah! That was the reason why many stalwart men looked askance at one another and shook their heads; and why others—more religious—crossed themselves and mumbled prayers.

Paddy O'Gorman neither shook his head over the mystery nor prayed. Nevertheless the clear young intelligence that Providence had put in command of his clean, strong body was trying to probe into the baffling circumstance. He loved the rugged life that was developing him—the pure air, the heavy labor, the primal grandeur of the granite hills that stretched on every side. His enthusiasm for the great job was almost holy. The thought that beneath this inspiring picture there were rats at work, gnawing, profiting themselves by the hard toil of others——

II

IT WAS mid-Summer. It was O'Gorman's habit before beginning a day's labor to enjoy a plunge in the Black Pool. This pool was a circular sheet of water about thirty feet in diameter, that welled up through a cup-shaped fissure at the southern slope of Barren Ridge.

Many a time Paddy had tried to dive to its bottom, but there was a certain swirl of water rushing up from some mysterious source that he had never been able to penetrate. Neither was he an amateur in the swimming game, or in the diving game for that matter. He knew the secret of storing air in his lungs.

The Black Pool overflowed across a ledge of rock that carried the escaping water down a slight declivity into a narrow ravine, through which it flowed southwestward into a maze of crags and thickets.

O'Gorman was the only man in camp who swam in the Black Pool. The others were wary of the cold, deep, mysterious, swirling water. They—that is, those of them who resorted to total immersion for their ablutions—usually went to one of the shallow bark-bottomed lakes with which this region abounds.

Paddy did not feel in the least put out over that fact. He liked the shock of the icy water's welcome and enjoyed pitting his strength against the mysterious current that welled up from the depths.

On the morning that followed the reported disappearance of the fourth Russian, Paddy, who had gone as usual to the pool, felt inclined to take a deep dive. In fact he had been preparing for it on the walk from camp. Accordingly, having reached the rock rim of the pool, he slipped nimbly out of his quintet of garments—cap, shirt, pants, socks, shoes—and took a header into the icy depths. That dive, as the melodramatists might say, was a dive of destiny.

The deeper he penetrated into the pool the more powerful seemed to become the upflow, leading him to believe that the current was constricted through some narrow aperture before being liberated into the bowl that held the pool. His wind was failing fast, however, and he was on the point of ceasing his effort and shooting back to the surface when his hands, forepointed for a breast stroke, encountered an object. What the object was he could not then determine, because his vision was limited to mere blurs and shadowy outlines scarcely distinguishable from the element that surrounded him.

Although a swimmer in dark and deep waters will instinctively recoil from anything he comes in sudden contact with that he can't at once identify—which is Nature's precautionary movement in the face of a possible danger—nevertheless in this instance Paddy did not recoil. Instead—like a boy who feels obligated to bring a pebble to the surface to prove he reached bottom—Paddy redoubled his efforts to retrieve whatever object lay beneath. He strove persistently downward, battling with the stubborn current.

His outstretched hands suddenly gripped a yielding substance that had the feel of cloth. Even as he tugged there flashed through his mind a suspicion of the nature of his discovery. With a half-suppressed gasp that almost drew water into his lungs he released his hold on the object and shot upward.

For a moment he clutched the rim of the pool and gulped the needed air into his windpipe. Then, looking behind him, he beheld what it was he had released from captivity in the pool. It was the body of a man, floating sluggishly on the surface of the water, supported by the pressure from beneath.

"Be the bones iv Saint Pathrick!" muttered O'Gorman. "I've fished up a Rooshun!"

After his first start of dismay, however, he conquered his repugnance and swam out to secure the body. He towed it to the rim of the pool and after some exertion succeeded in hauling it upon the rocks. Then he dressed and hurried to the general foreman's shack to notify Cronkhite. Twenty minutes later the rocky borders of the pool were crowded with workmen of half a dozen nationalities pointing at the body, conversing in excited whispers and gesticulating.

The victim was of a type at that time very common on the job. In life he had been a short, big-limbed Slovak with a shaggy brown beard that muffled his entire physiognomy up to the eyes. Mild, ox-like eyes. A slow-thinking, slow-moving *mujik*, laboring patiently to amass a hoard big enough to take him back to Russia and keep him in simple comfort the rest of his days.

As a rule such men neither mixed with other nationalities nor attempted to learn English. They crossed themselves reverently before and after each meal and prayed each morning at sunrise with their faces turned toward the East. The poorest of them owned gilt-edged, Morocco-bound, Greek-Orthodox Bibles. They got inoffensively drunk at times on white whisky—the nearest procurable thing to their native enlivener, vodka. Bearded innocents—just big babes in the wilderness.

"Ivan Uhlanov," muttered his Russian acquaintances, crossing themselves and mumbling prayers for the repose of his soul.

Uhlanov's body was searched under the direction of Cronkhite. The pockets were empty, but no marks of violence were discovered. A tiny ikon was found on the breast, half-imbedded in the matted hair and secured in place by a cord that circled the thick neck—a little fetish against harm that had proven pathetically unavailing.

"Now," demanded Cronkhite, turning abruptly to O'Gorman, "give us th' pertickslers, young feller. How did y'u come t' find this man?"

"Joost as I tould ye, Misther Crronkhite. I saw the Rooshun floatin' in the pool. I pulled him on the rrocks an' notified ye at wance."

"What d' y'u make of it, Joe?" enquired the general foreman gruffly of the camp clerk, Joe Conto, who stood beside him.

Conto seemed to be thoughtful. He tugged at his mustache, whispering at some length to Cronkhite, who presently exclaimed:

"Cashed all his time, eh? So's he c'd go back t' Russia? Didn't git very far, did he? Prob'ly got drunk an' lost his money, or got robbed. Fell inta th' pool las' night while tryin' t' git back t' camp in th' dark."

The general foreman hesitated a moment, his eyes returning to O'Gorman.

"I think there's somethin' dayper thon thot, Misther Crronkhite," hazarded the young Irishman significantly.

"Quite possible, my lad—quite possible," agreed Cronkhite with a half-snarl. "F'r instance, th' body might 'a' been robbed while 'twas in th' pool."

This thinly veiled accusation was not understood by the dead man's countrymen, but several of the English-speaking laborers looked at O'Gorman with suddenly suspicious eyes. Paddy, however, gave Cronkhite back glance for glance.

"I don't belave it," he retorted bluntly. "An' if annybody thinks I've anny iv the missin' money I'm willin' to shtand a searrch."

The accusing faces of the pick-and-shovel men immediately cleared. A glimmer of honest indignation shone in the young Irishman's eyes as he stared alternately at the general foreman and the clerk. Cronkhite shrugged his shoulders, glared at Paddy a moment as if to wither his presumptuousness and then growled:

"Y'u think there's somethin' deeper, eh? Bah! What do *y'ur* idees amount to? Y'u've only got a pick-an'-shovel brain!"

That ended the matter for the time being. The men went promptly about the business of Uhlanov's burial. The task was very simply accomplished. The body was carried to Fools' Hill. A shallow grave was scooped in the sand. The remains were interred to the accompaniment of hats off and prayers. Cronkhite then rode away on his big sorrel horse, and the men went about their interrupted day's labor.

It was Saturday—famous chiefly in the workingman's calendar as the day preceding Sunday. All that day, while Paddy O'Gorman picked and shoveled and argued with gnats and black flies and horse-flies and drank gallons of pure spring water to replace the moisture that sweated out of his system in streams, his pick-and-shovel brains were strangely busy. He was somehow glad that he had not told Cronkhite the full details of the finding of Uhlanov's body.

VANDA CAPADUX was Oriental in type—black eyes and hair, face oval and olive-tinted. Some said that Old Adam, the father, was Rumanian; others, that he was Italian; still others insisted that he was a renegade Gipsy. However, it is unnecessary to inflict him and his child on any particular race. Any ethnologist could have told you that they had been cradled not far from the Mediterranean Sea.

About a year previously they had come up from the South and started the blind tiger coincidently with the opening of the big Barren Ridge camp. Adam Capadux was tall and robust, bearded like a patriarch, with bushy black eyebrows overshadowing two miser eyes that followed constantly after Vanda like a hawk's.

Vanda Capadux served the drinks in the blind tiger. Women, excepting squaws and half-breeds, were very rare in this wilderness where hundreds of rough and half-savage men were living celibate lives through force of circumstance. The crafty old reprobate Adam profited by this condition by casting his Vanda as bait to the spenders—that is, he cast the bait with the rod always held firm in his hand ready to be yanked back at a second's notice.

It was Sunday morning—the saloon's

busy day. Old Adam sat on a high stool behind the little bar, making change and keeping his eyes on Vanda and the contraband beverage that he sold. Vanda passed from table to table, distributing tiny glasses of the white poison to those who banged with their fists and demanded it.

About a score of drinkers were present, and many of them, although it was only ten o'clock, were either drunk or half-drunk. The crowd included cockneys, half-breed French, Russian Slavs and, of course, the ubiquitous Irish. Among the latter was Paddy O'Gorman, although he sat alone at a table.

Big Dan O'Hara slouched through the open doorway and sat down beside Paddy.

"Well, me b'y," he asked jocosely, "have ye found anny more dead Rooshuns?"

Vanda Capadux, bringing him liquor, looked sharply at O'Gorman. Old Adam also squinted at the young Irishman beneath his shaggy brows. Big Dan tossed off the liquor that he had bought, banged on the slab table with his fist as a signal for another and then continued, muffling his deep voice to a whisper:

"Paddy, I hear some iv thim Rooshuns do be thinkin' ye took thot dead mon's money. Some wan tould thim thot belike ye took it an' hid it before notifyin' Crronkhite, an' thot was the raison why ye was so willin' to shtand a searrch."

"Who tould thim?" demanded O'Gorman, a slow flush of anger beginning to spread over his sunburned face.

"If I knew, Paddy, I'd sure tell ye thot same."

"Divil take me if I'd shtale anny mon's money, Dan!"

"I know ye wouldn't, Paddy; but what I'm afther dhrivin' at is thish: Don't ye be shpindin' too much change in thish place. It might lade the dead mon's fri'nds to think thot ye're makin' free wid the ghoul money."

"An' is it thot I'm to be currtailin' me own plishure on account iv thim ould whishkers an' their fool notions?" demanded O'Gorman scornfully. "I've a right to shpind me own money, haven't I?"

"Thrue, lad; but be aisy wid thish divilish pizen. 'Tis a quarre parrt iv the wurrld, widout law an' orrder, where ivery mon's for himsilf. Thim Rooshuns is like a lot iv shape, but I wouldn't be afther thrustin' thim too far if they take a dislike to ye."

O'Gorman's red mustache bristled.

"Brring us a dhrrink!" he bellowed, banging the table with his huge fist.

Big Dan O'Hara, shaking his head, had left the saloon and set out for camp, when there was a sudden clatter of hoofs on the trail, and a moment after Cronkhite entered. He stood at the bar and drank a glass of liquor, smirking at Vanda.

Just then there was a sound of brawling at the rear of the big shack. A cockney and a half-breed were at loggerheads, seemingly over Vanda Capadux. There followed the noise of splintering glass as the men hurled whisky-glasses at each other.

Then the cockney, bethinking himself of the representative weapons of his race, whipped over a straight right to the point of the half-breed's jaw. He was too unsteady with drink to make the punch effective, and his antagonist clinched with him over the table. Their frantic strugglings overturned the table and some benches. The surrounding crowd of half-drunken loungers ceased their jabber and got out of the way.

"Blawst 'im!" screamed the Londoner. "'E called 'er a bloomin' ——, 'e did!"

The cockney's chivalry had sprung to the fore. Although his class will often revile their own women in the worst Billingsgate, they will nevertheless turn about and fight like terriers at the slightest outside aspersion.

Suddenly a knife-blade flashed in the half-breed's hand. Cronkhite, for all his size, was an active man. He covered the distance between the bar and the back of the tiger in three leaps.

The half-breed had cut the cockney in the shoulder and was striving to land a body blow when the bones of his wrist snapped; the weapon fell from his fingers. A second later he was flat on his back on the floor.

Crunch! Crunch! A heavy, spurred boot-heel rose and fell—twice. Then Cronkhite tramped back to the bar, smirking again at Vanda Capadux, who had been watching the scuffle with both mockery and amusement shining in the black eyes.

O'Gorman saw the mutilated and unconscious half-breed carried out of the saloon by his murmuring companions—murmuring, because they evidently stood too much in fear of Cronkhite to lift their voices to a higher pitch. But there was something deeper than a murmur that lay back of those men's flashing black eyes.

Meanwhile some bystander had bandaged the wounded shoulder of the cockney, Briggs—Vanda Capadux, strangely enough, being apparently uninspired by sufficient gratitude to her champion to perform that office. Vanda's eyes at that moment were on the empty whisky-glasses. Then trade, suspended for the moment, began again in thriving fashion.

"What a —— iv a lot iv throuble," muttered O'Gorman, "can be shtarted wid wan pair iv eyes!"

SUNDAY noon dinner in the big log grub-shack was nearly over. Paddy O'Gorman, his appetite whetted to a razor-like keenness by the liquor he had drunk, was still busy with a huge portion of potatoes and boiled pork.

"A wurrd wid ye, lad."

Big Dan, coming across from the foremen's table, had touched him on the shoulder and was slouching out of the grub-shack. Paddy wonderingly followed. O'Hara led the way to a secluded spot at the rear of the camp, where, squatting on a rock among the spruces, the men lighted tobacco as a vain challenge to the encircling black flies and began to palaver.

"An' did ye see the shcrap, Paddy?"

"I did, Dan. An' between ye an' me, wid all proper rrispict to women in gineral, an' the mothers thot borre us in parrticular, I belave the Frinchy was rright."

"Ye were rright yistherday, Paddy—there's quarre doin's in the camp."

"There is, Dan—but ye give it too soft a name. 'Tis black *murther*."

"Pst!" cautioned the foreman, looking uneasily about. "Ye can't prrove it, Paddy."

"Not yet, bedad. If I could, I wouldn't be sittin' here so paceful, Dan."

"Now, Paddy, let thim Rooshuns handhle their own throubles. Shtick wid your own kind."

"Me own kind, ye say? Begorra, arren't we all iv the same kind, I ask? Us an' the Frinchies an' the Rooshuns an' the Cocks an' the Shwades and all the rist iv thim? Arren't we all thryin' wid pick an' shoovel to dig a dacint counthry out iv a wiltherness?"

"But ye was borrn a white mon, wasn't ye?"

"Thrue, an' it's up to a white mon to see thot a furriner gets a squarre dale. Between ye an' me, I don't see why we nade thim furriners at all. Why can't we do our own pickin' an' shoov'lin' an' lave the furriners where they belong? 'Tis because there's too many *Crronkhites* in the counthry—too many wantin' to dhress up an' be boss. So the Gooverrmint brrings furriners over here—undher prromise of protection, mind ye—to do the harrd wurrk thot the Crronkhites is too prroud an' lazy to do thimsilves.

"An' afther they've been doin' the harrd wurrk for months, or years belike, they're rrobbed an' murthered by furrin shnakes an' vultures thot follows thim over here wid thot very aim in view. Ye know it, an' I know it."

Big Dan stared at his blunt young companion, nervously twisting his heavy mustache the while.

"Thish job is bein' done by us wurrkin' min," went on O'Gorman sternly. "Not ye norr Crronkhite, but us wid the picks an' shoovels. An' ivery mon, furriners an' all, thot does an honesht day's wurrk should be prrotected by the bosses.

"Why doesn't Crronkhite attind to his dooties instid iv kapin' dhrunk all the time? Why doesn't he kape his min from bein' murthered an' rrobbed? Begorra, no! Instid iv thot, he's afther sharin' in the loot. Do ye mane to tell me thot he doesn't get grraft out iv thot blind tigerr?"

"The Gooverrmint winks at thim blind tigerrs, me b'y. These laddy-bucks will have their dhrink, wan way or another. If they couldn't get a dhrap on the job the half iv thim would be dhraggin' their time an' goin' ilsewhere."

"But the Gooverrmint doesn't wink at murther, Dan."

"But what the —— can *ye* do about it, Paddy?"

A whimsical smile played a moment about O'Gorman's stern mouth as he retorted grimly—

"Maybe I can dig a thrap for some iv these divils, wid me pick-an'-shoovel brrain."

He rose, knocking the ashes from his pipe. He was glad that he had not told any one the full details of the finding of Uhlanov's body.

O'GORMAN knew that Cronkhite's theory of the cause of the Russian's end was ridiculous. Standing at the pool's rim and looking down at the welling water, he realized conclusively, that no man could sink against such a current until his body became lodged in the rocks beneath. The body must have come from below and beyond the pool, some article of clothing having been caught and held by a projecting rock.

It required considerable agility; but he was young and limber, and he scaled the jagged escarpment overhanging the Black Pool and made his way to the crest of Barren Ridge. The big hump of granite was capped with a sparse growth of scrub pine, but he was able to travel northward along the ridge without difficulty.

Having reached the highest point of the hump, he sat down and smoked, enjoying the view. Half a mile to the south he could see the right-of-way, where O'Hara had his grading gang. Northward, beyond the ridge, was a succession of sand and rock cuts, curving gradually northwestward, where the remaining gangs in the camp were employed.

Barren Ridge bulked midway between the two operations. To blast out this big rock would be foolishly and enormously expensive. To tunnel it would be almost equally so. It was the hardest nut on the whole division for the engineers to crack.

They had concluded to loop the line about its base in the form of a bow; but a short curve of such nature would necessarily slow down traffic; it would be very hard on steel; and its engineering, involving embankments and trestle-work in the valley, would also prove expensive. Experts were expected to arrive some time during the Summer to start the job. These things O'Gorman had learned from his foreman, O'Hara.

Paddy then walked across the crest of Barren Ridge to its northern slope, scrambling down the steep declivity at the risk of breaking his neck. Suddenly he found himself in the wildest piece of wilderness he had ever been in.

Rocks, rocks, rocks—a regular forest of them jutting in all directions. Boulders, little crags, pinnacles and spires of rock, shelves of rock. The hollows and tiny dells scattered oasis-like among them were carpeted with moss and muskeg, out of which sprang a profusion of stunted spruces, pines and white birch-trees. Fat young ruffed grouse stopped their spruce-feeding to stare at him with curiously twinkling eyes while he scrambled uncertainly forward through the maze. They were so unaccustomed to man's depredations that he could easily have slain them with a stick.

He realized that he was possibly the first man who had ever plowed a path through the little fastness. The exhilaration that this thought gave him drove him on blunderingly over rock and muskeg and through thicket and ravine—sweating copiously, swatting black flies, mystified and happy.

The sound of running water struck his ears — rushing water, rather. Presently he came upon it—a swift stream about twelve feet wide flowing between smooth rock walls at least four or five feet high. Judged by the position of the declining sun, the stream was flowing southwestward. Paddy followed it northeastward, having a certain idea in his pick-and-shovel head that he would discover something interesting. That something, just as he had surmised, proved to be Old Adam's blind tiger.

The blind tiger comprised two shacks. There was the tiger proper, or booze hall—a huge, rectangular structure of the stockade type, probably patterned after the camp grub-shack. Then there was the private lair of Old Adam and his precocious child—a tiny log dwelling, but strongly built.

The dwelling was situated between the booze hall and the stream and was distant from the latter about twenty yards. A little pathway ran directly from the domicile to the stream's edge, at which point the overhanging walls were about four feet high. Paddy surmised that the path had been worn by daily visits to the stream to draw water. Also he realized that a man—particularly a drunken man—who fell into the stream would be whisked away without the slightest chance of being able to pull himself out.

No one was in sight at the moment. A guttural babbling that floated across from the booze shack informed Paddy that the blind-tiger operators were busy with their Sunday afternoon trade. From a pile of cut fagots standing near he selected a birchen stick and tossed it into the stream. Then he raced along the rocky trail that led from the blind tiger past the Black Pool.

Scarcely had he arrived, panting and breathless, at the pool's rim when the white-barked fagot popped to the surface, bobbed up and down a moment on the turbulent water and then swept down the declivity into the ravine beyond.

Paddy stood still a few moments, lungs still heaving from the sprint, peering at the tangle of crags and thickets through which the swift stream pushed its southward course, wondering how many skeletons of men were hidden there in fastnesses where the foot of man had never trod. Suddenly a shadow blocked his vision.

"Well, O'Gorman! looking for more Russians?"

He looked into the sneering face of Joe Conto, the camp clerk, who was on his way to the blind tiger. Paddy frowned.

"I thought maybe the nixt time it might be a dago," he retorted calmly, enjoying the angry flush that wiped the sneer from Conto's face.

MONDAY noon. Dan O'Hara's pickers and shovelers were striding hungrily up from the right-of-way toward midday grub. The thoughts of all excepting Paddy O'Gorman were centered on forthcoming beans.

"Dan," he said, walking beside the foreman, "I'm takin' the afthernoon off."

"The —— ye say!" exclaimed O'Hara. "What are ye up to?"

"I'm goin' to get dhrunk."

Big Dan looked him over in frank disapproval.

"But didn't ye have all the day yistherday to get dhrunk?" he expostulated.

"I never get dhrunk in a crowd, Dan," replied O'Gorman solemnly.

O'Hara stared after him, shaking his head.

Paddy continued his explorations of the previous afternoon. On this occasion, however, he followed the stream southwestward, experiencing almost insuperable difficulties in weaving his way through the maze of crags, thickets and muskeg. Suddenly it swung southward, and he could see the swift-running water foaming and quickening its pace. Then, at a spot where the gray granite hump rose almost directly overhead, the water slid into a cavern and disappeared from view. The young explorer stood silent some minutes gazing at his discovery while the light of a strange enthusiasm shone in his eyes.

O'GORMAN rested his tired frame on a bench and called for white whisky. Monday afternoon trade was dull, as most of Old Adam's clientele were at work picking and shoveling for more dollars to chuck into his money-bags.

A man staggered out of the gloomy rear of the shack—Briggs, the cockney with bandaged shoulder. He anchored with some difficulty against the bar, at the same time fumbling fruitlessly in his pockets with his one available hand.

"No monee," grunted the miser, his teeth flashing scornfully through his beard—teeth cracked and yellow as an old dog's. "No monee, no dreenk—hah?"

Adam looked across at O'Gorman as if courting approbation of his cautiousness; the cockney's chivalry of yesterday all forgotten.

"I'll buy ye a dhrink, Cock," volunteered Paddy.

This solicitude on the part of an Irishman puzzled Briggs, who did not know that Paddy's mind was above racial bigotry. The cockney gladly accepted the invitation, but before nightfall Paddy had repented of it because Briggs proved to be a sponge. He railed unceasingly against knife fighters, in the barbarous accents of his class.

"Ye ought to have more sinse, Cock, thon to fight a half-brrade wid your fishts," advised O'Gorman. "Some min won't fight wid the fishts. They shtrike at ye like shnakes in the darrk. Ye have to fight thim wid your brrains."

"Bli' me hif Hi don't 'ammer ' is bleedin' 'ead hoff!" shrilled the cockney.

Old Adam was looking at Paddy with a strange glint in his hawk eyes. Meanwhile night had crept over the granite hills. Lamps were lighted in the booze shack. The evening delegation of pickers and shovelers began crowding into the tiger and Vanda Capadux came forth, vain in the consciousness of her own beauty, to reap the waiting harvest.

O'Gorman's cockney table mate was at last speechless from drink, slumped over the table in utter oblivion. Paddy then feigned drunkenness and presently he saw Old Adam and Vanda exchanging some whispered words while they glanced apparently casually in his direction.

This significant procedure inspired the Irishman to attempt a little maudlin flirtation with Vanda. Vanda's customary deportment in the booze hall was a half-mocking aloofness broken occasionally by a cautious and spicy smile at some heavy spender, as if to insinuate that Old Adam's presence was wholly responsible for her lack of cordiality. Paddy's broad and good-natured smirks, however, appeared to interest Vanda; and the old miser seemed unaccountably oblivious to the amorous play.

Paddy banged frequently with his great fist upon the slab table, freely spending his money. The black-eyed barmaid brought him the liquor, her smile openly inviting, but a finger on her rouged lips exhorting him to caution. Paddy knew he was being vamped, of course. His clean young faculties, masked by drunken pretense, bored through the surface friendliness and found the wary and predacious glint in those luminous eyes. The saloon lacked such nonessentials as cuspidors, but Paddy managed to pour most of the whisky into a chink between the rough flooring and the stockade wall of the shack.

Well on toward midnight; the cockney, Briggs, still in his stupor; drunkards endlessly arguing, some of them yawning, others sleepily wabbling out of the saloon on their way back to bunk; Vanda Capadux still vamping O'Gorman, watching with cat's eyes for the first symptoms of his collapse——

Paddy, however, had not the faintest notion of collapsing. All evening, out of the tail of his eye and through the clouds of rank smoke that eddied in the stale air, he had been watching five Russians who sat at an adjoining table, quietly drinking.

Occasionally one or another of them had stared vacantly at O'Gorman out of mild, ox-like, incurious eyes. Now and again a guttural monosyllable had dropped between bearded lips.

A strange and machine-like demeanor characterized these men. There was something methodical about their conduct which suggested that the party was deliberately being prolonged on account of some preconceived plan.

With Big Dan's warning fresh in his memory, O'Gorman did not feel at ease. He decided to make the first move and test his suspicions. Certain ideas that he had as to the true nature and accomplishments of Vanda Capadux could be verified another time. Therefore, with a great show of intoxication, he stumbled out of the booze shack into the night, following the rocky trail about fifty yards and then crawling into the outlying underbrush.

He had not been lying in concealment longer than three minutes when, peering cautiously from his retreat, he espied five figures passing along the trail, shadowy and silent. Presently he saw a single figure striding rapidly in the opposite direction—toward the blind tiger. The long legs gave him instant clue to the latter's identity. It was Big Dan O'Hara, probably looking for him—loyal to his own kind. A few minutes later O'Hara returned along the trail, muttering.

"—— young fool," came audibly to Paddy's ears.

Horses' hoofs clinking on the rocks in the still night identified Cronkhite as the next arrival. O'Gorman lay quiet in the underbrush, listening and watching. Soon a little procession of figures wended its way campward. He could hear singing, laughing and blasphemy strangely intermingled. Most of the curses were contributed by one voice that rose high above the others.

"Blawst 'im!" it shrilled. "The —— ——! Shykes me an' 'eaves me hout of the plyce like I was a blinkin' ——! Bli' me hif Hi don't 'ammer 'is bleedin' 'ead hoff!"

"Brrriggs!" said Paddy to himself in an amused whisper. "The gineral forrmon's arrm is none too gintil whin wakin' up a dhrunk."

When night had swallowed the returning booze-fighters O'Gorman got on his feet and cautiously approached the blind tiger. Notwithstanding the liquor he had drunk his faculties were tolerably clear and perceptive. His suspicions of Vanda Capadux had given birth to an amazing train of thought, and in order to try to verify his opinion he did not scruple to play the spy.

Cronkhite's big sorrel, restlessly stamping, stood at the hitching-post. The lamps in the big shack, excepting one, had been extinguished. Through an open side window came a faint glow. Voices were indistinctly audible—whispered accents that aroused his interest.

He crept to the window and lifted himself carefully, inch by inch, upon tiptoe. He saw the broad back of Cronkhite, who was standing by the bar. Across from Cronkhite sat Old Adam on the high stool, avarice shining in the hawk eyes, long fingers clutching the bar—crooked fingers tipped with nails curved and pointed like the talons of a bird of prey. Vanda stood with folded arms; in her black orbs a somber, calculating light. The general foreman seemed to be jotting figures on a paper.

"Ten thousan'," he grunted. "Y'u've made ten thousan' out o' my shovel stiffs in th' last year, Adam."

"Ten t'ousan'—pouf!" croaked the miser. "W'y you teenk ten t'ousan'— hah? Onlee seex t'ousan', Meesta Cronkeet."

"Bah! Y'u can't kid *me*, y'u ol' fox, even if y'u did cheat me on th' percentage—hey, Vanda?"

"W'y you teenk ten t'ousan'—hah?" persisted Adam craftily.

"Because I c'n figger—that's why. Y'u've used two hunderd gallons o' alky, haven't y'u? Two hunderd gallons o' alky makes five hundred gallons o' booze. Five hunderd gallons o' booze makes a total o' two thousan' quarts. Twenty-five shots t' a quart—fifty thousan' shots. Fifty thousan' shots at two-bits a throw, twelve thousand five hunderd dollars. How's that fur figgerin'? Now th' alky cost eight dollars a gallon—sixteen hunderd dollars. Take nine hunderd fur runnin' expenses. That leaves ten thousan', even."

A smile of conscious intellectuality beamed on Cronkhite's coarse face. Adam seemed somewhat disconcerted. He clawed reflectively at his greasy beard.

"You no feegre vaste—loss—hah?"

"——! What waste an' loss have y'u got in this dump? A louse couldn't git cock-eyed on what y'u've wasted in th' last year, an' as fur's loss is concerned—bah—! Vanda don't shove a shot acrost t' one o' them birds till she's got her fingers on th' cur'ncy—hey, Vanda?"

Vanda Capadux was looking intently at Cronkhite. There was a strange brilliance in the black eyes. Cronkhite's face lost its jocular expression, and he quivered slightly.

"But I ain't kickin', Adam," he continued reassuringly, still looking at Vanda. "I ain't kickin'. Money ain't ev'rythin'."

He stepped suddenly toward Vanda as if about to take a liberty with her person. Vanda's arms unfolded with snakelike swiftness, and a dagger gleamed in the air above the general foreman's breast.

"You spitfire!" the man panted hoarsely, his body trembling with passion, his face purple with emotion and drink.

Curiously enough, Old Adam seemed to be looking away from the exciting tableau. And Paddy, on the alert for every possible detail, was almost certain that the miser's bearded face wore an ironic smile.

"Not yet," breathed Vanda in a low, clear whisper, glancing significantly toward the figure of Old Adam.

"When?" persisted Cronkhite, his rough tones made ludicrous by their abortive attempt at an answering whisper.

His bloodshot gaze went back and forth between the uplifted dagger and the baffling black eyes. Vanda's reply was so low that Paddy failed to overhear it, but he saw her put away the dagger very slowly, the black eyes never for a second leaving Cronkhite's distorted face. In the eyes grew a luminous expression that seemed to hold all the mystery and seductiveness of the Orient.

Cronkhite groaned. His hairy hand shook as he shoved the empty whisky-glass across the bar. Vanda leisurely filled it, still holding him with vampire eyes. Three glasses of the liquor, one after another, Cronkhite gulped. The poison seemed to soothe his racked spirit. He sighed, resignedly shaking his head. Presently he went out to his impatient horse and took the trail back to camp.

Fires of wrath blazed in O'Gorman's honest breast as he strode along the trail in the darkness.

"Sold out, arre we?" he was muttering. "Us shoovel shtiffs barthered away by our own boss for the furriners' profit, begorra! Crronkhite laves thim do the dirthy wurrk, but he isn't aboove sharin' in the percintage. Thim divils wid their undherground channels iv thrade arre corruptin' the counthry as fasht as us wurrkin' min wid our arrms an' our backs can divilip it. Sivin hundhred per cint. profit on thot rrotgut booze—think iv thot! Honest wurrkin' min payin' for their little wakenisses wid their sweat an' their blood!

" 'Pick-an'-shoovel brrains' Crronkhite is afther callin' us, bedad! An' him wid no more sinse in his shkull thon to play wid pizen shnakes!"

Paddy suddenly stopped and gazed ahead

along the trail. Fleecy patches of cloud half-obscured the starlit sky; but, about two hundred yards distant, he could discern the black outline of the southern slope of Barren Ridge, past which the trail led. At the foot of the slope was the Black Pool, and about the pool were many boulders and slabs of rock among which it would be an easy matter for men to conceal themselves.

Paddy's sudden halt was occasioned by a tiny glimmer of light that he had observed among those rocks. He surmised it to be the flicker of a match caused by somebody lighting a pipe.

"Thim Rooshuns do be layin' for me," he thought.

He realized that it would be the logical place for an ambuscade. A man's body could be thrown into the pool; it would be carried over the ledge into the ravine and swept away into the thickets. Beyond doubt the Russians were planning to murder him.

Paddy thus found himself in a bad dilemma. He could not explain matters to the Russians, because he did not understand Russian and they did not understand English. There was only one trail to the camp—the one he was following. It crossed the ravine just beyond the Black Pool. The ravine was spanned by a small log bridge, and a few hundred yards beyond the bridge lay the camp. But if Paddy attempted to reach the bridge he would undoubtedly, he reasoned, be waylaid by the men hiding beside the Black Pool.

Hesitating, he turned about at last and slowly retraced his steps toward the tiger, thinking that the Russians would finally get tired of the midnight vigil and disperse to their bunks. In broad daylight his stout Hibernian nature would not have yielded an inch to a whole gang of Russians. But a night ambush at odds of five to one was a different matter. Paddy had as much regard for life as any other normal young man, and his mind did not in the least confuse bravado and courage.

Moreover, he sympathized considerably with those quiet, bearded, innocent men who had come to a foreign land to toil, and whose willingness to toil was merely an incentive to their ruthless exploitation. Ignorant of the country's laws, language and institutions, how were they to distinguish enemies from friends? Their views were secretly warped by men with private axes to grind. Some one with a grudge against O'Gorman, or with a desire to start the Russians on a false scent, or both, had whispered to them that O'Gorman had robbed—maybe murdered—their comrade Uhlanov. Perhaps not alone Uhlanov, but also the other missing Russians, had been disposed of in like manner—how were they to know?

At any rate it was significant in their minds that the Irishman had found Uhlanov's body, that he had been alone when he found it, and that the man had nothing left of the big sum of money he was said to have drawn. Therefore, on the principle of "an eye for an eye," they had undoubtedly decided to do away with O'Gorman and consign him as a matter of justice to the Black Pool.

While Paddy's thoughts ran in this uncheerful channel he found himself again approaching the blind tiger. The lamp in the booze shack had been extinguished, but he could see a flicker of light from the window of the log dwelling at the rear. A sudden impulse prompted him to reconnoiter with a view to learning more if possible about the nefarious gang that had evidently besotted Cronkhite, hoodwinked him and started in to plunder the camp.

Paddy crept carefully beneath the window. A curtain balked prying vision, but he used his ears. A strange language was being spoken within, and three male voices seemed engaged in it. Why three? This fact made him ponder deeply. He knew that Cronkhite had returned to the camp. Presently the converse became more intelligible.

"Pavlovitch," he heard, "twelve hundred. Petrovsky, eighteen hundred. Ketchnikov, sixteen hundred. Uhlanov, fifteen hundred. Total, six thousand, one hundred. Your share, three thousand and fifty."

"T'ree t'ousan' feefty—pouf!"

There was a moment's silence, then another period of chattering in the strange tongue.

"O'Gorman," he heard finally, "eight hundred. We must get the Irishman. He thinks there is something wrong. Maybe the Russians will do the job for us, because I told them he robbed Uhlanov. But if they don't do it, they'll get the blame anyway—hah?"

A sudden cry of rage was only half-stifled in Paddy's throat. He clearly recognized the voice of Joe Conto, the camp clerk. Conto, therefore, had denounced him to the Russians. Eight hundred dollars was the sum due him on the company books over and above the amounts he had drawn. Eight hundred dollars that he had sweated for, that he had picked and shoveled out of raw Nature with the strength of his arms and back, being calmly appropriated to themselves by these fiends!

O'Gorman's huge hands opened and shut, the nails cutting into the palms. Paddy felt a mad desire to smash in the door and confront the scoundrels.

Bue even while he stood undecided beneath the window, striving to regain control of his outraged feelings, something was pulled suddenly over his head, shoulders and arms, pinning his arms helplessly to his sides. He tried to shout, but began strangling instead, because his nostrils were filled with a fine powder like flour. He realized at once that he was imprisoned in an empty flour-sack—one of those stout, cotton-lined burlap bags of two hundred pounds' capacity.

Though coughing and wheezing violently, he exerted his strength against the sides of the bag; but the tough fibers, reinforced with cotton, could not easily be burst apart. Then he was dragged along the ground for some distance despite the furious kicks he directed blindly at his assailants.

"An Irishman this time instead of a dago," hissed a voice in his ear.

Then the flour sack was yanked away. But before he could spring to his feet and grapple with the murderers he was pushed into the cold and rushing stream. It bore him quickly away from the spot, although he strove in frenzy to dig his fingers into some sort of hand-hold along the smooth rock walls.

That quality in man that prompts him to struggle against death as long as breath remains in his body collected Paddy's dismayed faculties and forced them to cooperate. Having already explored the stream from the blind tiger to the northern slope of Barren Ridge where it disappeared under the rock, he realized at once the futility of trying to pull himself out. Centuries of erosion had given it a deep and smooth bed. He knew he was trapped—that he must take his chances through the cavern and the Black Pool. So he braced himself with the energy of desperation and began preparing for a dive.

First he stretched himself backward full length on the surface of the stream. In the swift current no effort was necessary to keep him afloat. Then he began storing air in his lungs. He exhaled completely, forcing every bit of air out of the pulmonary tract. Then he inhaled deeply, distending his lungs and cramming them to the fullest capacity with oxygen. He continued this process, thus thoroughly oxidizing his system.

Carried along feet foremost on the stream's surface and glancing up between the rock walls while alternately pumping air in and out of his lungs he saw a few stars twinkling through the fleece-cloud above the spruce tops. He wondered if he should ever see stars again. His youthful rashness bade fair to terminate a life that was scarcely begun.

After all, he reflected, he had only pick-and-shovel brains. He had butted in beyond his depth and experience and was on the verge of paying the penalty. Then a sudden wave of anger rushed over him, steeling him against all thought of his danger and urging him to live and bring the scoundrels to justice.

Suddenly the stars dropped out of his vision. A gust of chill, damp air greeted him out of the blackness. The rushing of the water held a vibrant note. He knew that he was in the cavern and that, above and about him, stretched the solid granite of Barren Ridge. He was now convinced that there was no possible means of escape excepting through the Black Pool, and although his heart was pounding furiously with excitement he continued making preparations for the dive.

The speed of the stream presently slackened, then died gradually away to a sluggish pace that no longer supported Paddy. He began treading water, and as he did so he felt a slight pull at his feet. It was an undertow. He believed that he was floating in a sort of reservoir that was separated from the Black Pool by a wall of rock. Probably the volume of water in the reservoir was great enough to force the underlying water through a deep crevice into the pool.

It was a gruesome feeling, thus to be entombed in a black channel whither not the faintest ray of light could penetrate, and to escape from which he must dive blindly through a cistern in search of a crevice.

He knew, however, that such an outlet must be there—that if Uhlanov's body could find its way through, so could he.

Thinking of Uhlanov sent another chill down his already shivering spine. He recollected with a start that the dead Russian's avenging comrades sat waiting for him at the Black Pool! Even if he should survive the ordeal—even if he could locate the crevice in time and finally grope his way through it and swim upward to safety—he would emerge, breathless and exhausted, right in the midst of the five men who were waiting to murder him!

The young Irishman's stout heart began to quail. Already he was half-numb in the icy water. His teeth were chattering. His position was desperate. He was losing time.

There was a possible chance that the wall of the big cistern contained some little cavern or niche above the water-line into which he could crawl for the time being. Perhaps there was a piece of flat rock or a ledge on which he could find temporary safety.

But Paddy realized that he could not remain much longer in the water and live. Already his limbs were beginning to stiffen with cold. If he wasted precious time swimming blindly about in the darkness and his search for a refuge proved unsuccessful, he would be too weak and too stiff to undertake the dive. Even if he did discover some hole into which he could crawl and rest himself, his plight would be little better than before.

One thing remained to be done before undertaking what might prove to be his last act on earth. Paddy did it fervently, through chattering teeth and with the numb forefinger of his right hand. Then, having concluded the simple little ritual of his faith, a stern fortitude possessed him. At last, having crammed his lungs well-nigh to the bursting point with the damp air, he turned head foremost into the cold current and dived.

At first he sank slowly. Then the undertow gripped him and began hurrying him along. Deeper, deeper, deeper. His body began turning slowly, as if his head were on a pivot. He felt dizzy, but his confidence was increasing, because he now realized that the suction would draw him to the crevice more surely than would any effort of his own. He had presence of mind to clasp his arms over his head as a possible safeguard against outcropping rocks.

The pressure on his ear-drums began to bother him, gradually becoming almost intolerable. His wind was beginning to fail. His confidence suffered a shock. He had been under water over a minute and had not yet reached the crevice.

Cautiously he began exhaling carbonic acid gas—slowly, grudingly and with a fierce determination not to yield to the panic that attempted to grip him and set his brain on fire.

All at once the current seemed to gush out ahead of him—no longer downward, but forward. His arms, protecting his head, were bruised against rock. The roarings in his head became intensified. He kicked out desperately—at last felt himself being flung slantwise upward. Two seconds—and he would be safe.

Those two seconds seemed to be eternity. His lungs, depleted of all air, were convulsively heaving. He felt impelled toward one huge intake of water to end the excruciating pain. One second— Could he continue the agony? Ah-h——!

THE outlines of the five figures crouching beside the Black Pool were scarcely distinguishable from those of the outlying rocks. Some few minutes previously one of these figures had arrived from the camp and rejoined the other four, shaking his shaggy head and whispering. Immediately the eyes of all five had been turned toward the rocky trail that led down from the blind tiger.

No moon was in the sky. Such starlight as struggled through the cloud patches but dimly illumined the trail. A figure coming along it could not be seen at a distance of over a hundred yards. The night was still, though, and sounds could be detected at some point farther up.

One of the watchers jostled the shoulder of a comrade who had begun lighting his pipe. The man hurriedly extinguished the match, and all bent forward, watching and listening. Presently the sounds ceased.

Above the waiting men rose the jagged outline of the Barren Ridge. Beneath them, hidden in the black shadow of the ridge, lay the pool, dark, mysterious, sinister—the purling of its troubled water-merged with the quiet hissing of the current that flowed across the rock ledge into the ravine.

The quintet sat patiently, staring through the gloom, straining their ears to catch sounds, other than the quiet notes of the running water, that disturbed the still night. They gripped sharp clasp-knives in their calloused fingers—honest pick-and-shovel fingers that drew the knife only with reluctance as a defense against the strange Terror that menaced them in a strange land.

The night wore on. Still they crouched—stolid, silent, devoutly crossing themselves at intervals as they glanced below at the dark water that had taken the life of their mate.

"Ah—h!"

It was a weird, long-drawn, gurgling gasp. It sounded like the desperate effort of a choking man to get air into his lungs. It was a horrible sound, coming thus out of the midnight darkness that shrouded the Black Pool—that sinister abode of the spirits of drowned men.

Frenzied shouts rang in the shadows. Five lurking figures sprang to their feet and dashed along the trail in mad haste to get away from the haunted spot—five burly men who fled without stopping, crossing themselves and spouting prayers while they ran.

Paddy O'Gorman clutched the rock rim of the pool, gasping cool night air—the sweet oxygen of Nature—into his tortured lungs. Then after he had had his fill of the revivifying gas he crawled upon the rocks, stamped vigorously to get the blood moving through his half-frozen veins, looked again at the faint-twinkling stars and—laughed.

"Ye shape!" he rumbled happily. "While ye've been thirshtin' for me hearrt's blood, I'm afther comin' through wan iv the black alleys iv purrgathory for the sake iv ye!"

Paddy crossed the bridge and walked swiftly along the trail in the wake of the demoralized Russians. He paused at the right-of-way, looking eagerly at the lights of the big camp where they glimmered invitingly through the night, thinking of his warm bunk, of morning flapjacks and coffee, of the eight hundred dollars of hard-earned money that he had on the company books.

"Now if I didn't have pick-an'-shoovel brrains," he muttered, "I'd be afther headin' shtraight back to me boonk an' goin' to slape."

Shivering, sleepy, hungry, exhausted, Paddy turned to the left along the right-of-way and began the hundred-mile hike to the steel.

"SHURE, now, 'tis a quarre parrt iv the wurrld, widout law an' ordher," grumbled Big Dan O'Hara for the hundredth time since the disappearance of young Paddy O'Gorman.

The grade foreman, pipe in mouth, disconsolately shook his head as he watched his "white min" pick and shovel monotonously on the grade. Big Dan's rough and amiable face seemed careworn.

There were two vacancies in the ranks of his gang. Two weeks after O'Gorman had vanished, a cockney named Briggs had dropped out of sight. Later on, however, the body of Briggs had been discovered lying just off the right-of-way with a knife buried in the breast.

Paddy's fate still remained a mystery. It was commonly whispered, though, that the Russians had learned that it was he who had robbed Uhlanov, and that they had avenged themselves. But what could be done, in the absence of proof? So far the only law in the country was the primal law of man to man.

Big Dan, looking down-grade toward the south, thinking abstractedly of the blue eyes and quick tongue of Paddy O'Gorman and the huge hands that could pick and shovel as much as any two men on the grade, suddenly shaded his eyes with his hand. He descried four horsemen cantering toward them along the right-of-way. As they drew nearer he remarked that the two foremost had bronzed faces and sat their mounts with a negligent ease that bespoke much time in the saddle.

Of the two that followed, one was a slim, stoop-shouldered man with a studious face, the other an alert, middle-aged, pale-faced man who wore glasses. O'Hara instinctively lifted his hand in salute as the little cavalcade passed by.

The arrival of strangers was no uncommon event in the big depot camp. Engineers and surveyors were continually coming and going, while almost daily laborers and contractors passed through on their way to other camps. The new arrivals rode directly to the stockade stable and put up their mounts.

"Any chance of gettin' a drink around here, boss?" inquired one of the bronzed escort casually.

It was a common question, and the stable boss indifferently replied:

"Sure. Dago j'int up beyant th' ridge. Foller th' trail from th' right-o'-way, up apast th' pool."

The party broke up after leaving the stables; the slim, stoop-shouldered man walking toward the general foreman's office; the two sunburned riders taking the trail to the blind tiger, followed presently by the man with the glasses. The last-named stopped beside the Black Pool, gazing for some time reflectively at the swirling water and then upward along the jagged face of the ridge. Then he put his glasses in his pocket and began resolutely making the difficult ascent. Though his muscles had probably been developed in a gymnasium, he was nevertheless a fair athlete for a man of his age.

"That young Irishman," he panted, "must be a regular mountain goat."

Arrived at the crest, he readjusted his glasses and closely scanned the panorama that spread out beneath him, taking in every detail from the graded right-of-way at the south around the projected loop to the succession of sand and rock cuts at the north. Then he put away his glasses again and began climbing cautiously down the northern slope of the ridge; scrambling over rocks, floundering through muskeg and breaking through thickets and underbrush until he arrived at the stream.

The sight of the water elated him. He took a chart from his pocket and pondered over it, while ruffed grouse stared at him curiously from the coverts and a swarm of black flies circled unheeded about his head.

A SLIM, studious-faced man sat hunched over Cronkhite's desk, checking over the camp accounts.

"These laborers," he mused, "Pavlovitch, Petrovsky, Ketchnikov and Uhlanov—also O'Gorman and Briggs, they have left camp, I take it?"

"Two of 'em's planted here," replied the general foreman with an unfeeling grunt. "Uhlanov an' Briggs. Th' Rooshun got drownded. Th' Cock we found last week offen th' right o' way with a knife in 'im."

"Facts reported, of course?"

"Y'u reported them deaths, didn't y'u, Joe?" growled Cronkhite to the clerk.

Conto rose from his stool and faced the auditor. He was a short, thick-set man with black mustache and black eyes, speaking English with the merest trace of an accent.

"Yes, sir," he returned respectfully. "I wrote the particulars to headquarters."

"It appears that they had drawn out all their money prior to their deaths. Who cashed their time-slips?"

"Old Adam—the man that runs the saloon," explained Conto.

"Ah!" said the auditor. "And the other four? The three Russians and the Irishman?"

"Drew their time and left camp," responded the clerk. "But there's some talk that the Russians got O'Gorman afterward. They claim he robbed the body of Uhlanov—maybe croaked him—because O'Gorman was the one that found the body in the pool, or claimed he did. Anyway we heard the Russians were laying for him."

"I see," said the auditor softly.

He examined several of the accounts.

"The Russians were evidently all illiterate. I note that when receipting for tobacco, clothing, cash advances, *et cetera*, they did not sign their names—merely made their marks."

"Most of 'em are ignorant," assented Conto.

"I see. And you signed for them, Mr. Conto, and witnessed their marks?"

"Like I'm supposed to do," admitted the clerk.

"And their time-slips? The man who cashed them probably signed those men's names himself and witnessed their marks?"

"Sure."

"I see. Thank you, Mr. Conto."

The auditor considered a moment, reflectively tapping his forehead with his pencil.

"I should like," he said slowly, "to interview this saloonkeeper—the man who cashed those time-slips."

A slight shadow crossed the clerk's brow. He looked inquiringly at Cronkhite. A puzzled expression appeared on the general foreman's gross red face. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"All right," he agreed indifferently. "Take th' auditor over t' Adam's, Joe."

IT WAS Saturday afternoon, and the blind-tiger operators were preparing to meet the exigencies of the week-end carouse. Old Adam had opened two demijohns of his poison and was counting out little piles of silver for making quick change. Vanda put oil in the lamps and set rows of tiny drinking-glasses within easy reach on the bar.

So far there were only three customers—a man with glasses who sat at a table looking over some papers, and two sunburned fellows who were arguing peaceably near by. Except for the monotonous tones of the two arguers the big shack was in quiet.

Joe Conto walked in, followed by the auditor. There was a lightning interchange of glances among Old Adam, Vanda and the clerk. The man with the glasses gave the newcomers a glance of mild curiosity.

"The auditor," said Joe Conto in a significant tone, looking meanwhile at Adam, "thinks there's something wrong about some of the time-slips you cashed."

"Since you are astute enough to arrive thus at my private conclusions," retorted the auditor dryly, "I shall go you one better and say that I *know* there is something wrong with them."

The man with the glasses quietly gathered up his papers and put them in his pocket. The two arguers yawned, one of them rising and walking to the bar with the empty whisky-glasses. He put down the glasses and stood by the front door, his eyes on Joe Conto. His companion had meanwhile sauntered leisurely to the rear door.

Joe Conto's black eyes darted swiftly about, taking in all these maneuvers. He stepped lithely toward the front door, but found himself looking into the cold eye of a Colt's automatic.

"Who are *you?* What do you mean?" he demanded.

"The house is pinched," replied the trooper laconically.

"What's the idea?"

"Sellin' contraband liquor. Breakin' the law."

"*I'm* not. What are you poking that thing at *me* for?"

"To put a hole through you if you take one more step."

Conto stared, furiously gnawing his black mustache, a sudden fear gripping him. Vanda Capadux stood still and silent—white-faced, but with a trace of mockery in the black eyes. Old Adam's claw-like fingers abandoned their aimless clutchings and began raking the piles of silver from his counter into a money-bag. His cracked yellow teeth showed bare like a trapped animal's through his greasy beard.

Sudden hoofbeats sounded on the trail, and a moment later Cronkhite appeared, wearing the sodden frown that always distinguished him. His appearance at this juncture was due to the fact that, after the clerk and the auditor had left his office, the significance of some of the latter's remarks and queries had penetrated to his understanding. He gathered that for some reason Old Adam's business methods were under suspicion. Inasmuch as he was vitally interested in Adam's affairs, he had decided to ride at once to the tiger and investigate.

"What th' ——'s this?" he demanded, his ponderous faculties slowly gathering the significance of the tableau before him.

The man with the glasses joined the group.

"Mr. Cronkhite?" he asked quietly.

"That's me," growled the other, his scowling red face turning instantly toward the speaker. "Who are y'u, an' who's them other fellers, an' what's th' meanin' o' th' hold-up?"

"My name's Robertson," replied the man with the glasses. "I'm the chief engineer. These men are officers of the law. It isn't a hold-up—it's a show-down."

Cronkhite's blear eyes widened. His face took on an expression of sudden meekness.

" 'Scuse *me* chief," he apologized respectfully. "But what——"

"Sit down, Cronkhite—you and your clerk. Sergeant, see that the doors are well guarded. Now, Cronkhite, for some time past there have been strange rumors about men disappearing from your camp. These men were always long-timers on the job—steady workers who had saved considerable money that was held to their credit on the company books and which seems to have been drawn out in lump sums just prior to the disappearances.

"Now to properly police four thousand miles of wilderness and give full protection to all our workers has been next to an impossible task—so far. Unfortunately there are sinister forces at work among them who do not hesitate to murder them in order to reap the profit of their toil."

The chief engineer paused, looking fixedly at the two men sitting across from him at the table, glancing also at the Capaduxes out of the corner of his eye. There was not a sound in the big shack. The old miser was gazing intently at the chief, one hand clawing nervously at his beard. Vanda stood silent beside him, black eyes half-hidden by drooping lids.

Joe Conto's white teeth still gnawed at the black mustache; his black eyes were focused on the steady barrel of the Colt's automatic that guarded the door; his face had assumed a dirty grayish hue. Cronkhite's coarse features showed only an expression of utter surprize. The chief, noting these various details, then pulled a map from his pocket, spreading it carefully on the table.

"Now," he continued calmly, "here is the working plan of the construction approved for this Barren Ridge section. Whether due to incompetence or to the extremely inaccessible nature of the outlying terrane, is a matter of individual opinion; but at any rate our surveyors failed utterly to discover and chart a certain stream. The stream exists, but it does not appear at all on the paper location of the line. I admit that I share the blame with the surveyors; because over a year ago, before this camp was established, I personally visited this section before approving plans for the curve; and I overlooked the stream as completely as those who preceded me."

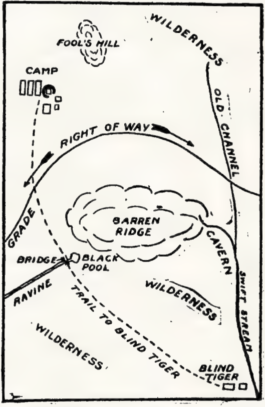
With quick strokes of his pencil the chief traced the water-course on the map.

"I find this stream to be perennial, and probably an outlet of one of the smaller lakes of the Height of Land. Originally it flowed southwestward past the northern slope of Barren Ridge. Later, after centuries of erosion, its current was split at this point, part of it verging southward and flowing into a fissure at the base of the ridge.

"Thousands of bitter Winters kept freezing the water in this fissure, constantly widening it by splitting the rock. Gradually this channel drew the entire stream from its course, discharging it through the spring that is called the Black Pool, at the southern slope of the ridge.

"With the passing of the centuries the constant flow of this water formed a cavern. At the southern extremity of this cavern there is a natural reservoir caused by the water backing up in the channel to gather pressure enough to force itself through the old out-take into the Black Pool.

"The principle is very simple. You pump water into a sprinkling-can. If the spout of the can be no higher than the rim of the can itself, you may keep on pumping and the water will not slop over the sides of the can. On the other hand, it will keep forcing the underlying volume upward through the spout and overboard. The Black Pool is merely the spout of the natural reservoir at the end of this channel."



A dull wonder showed on Cronkhite's face. Conto stared at the map, his eyes presently returning to the sergeant on guard.

"Now we return to the subject of the disappearing men. This stream that I have described flows down from the northeastern wilderness, passing this blind tiger some few yards to the north. It is a deep and swift stream. Its banks are rock, rising sheer to a height of about four or five feet—rock worn smooth by the rapid flow of water.

"This stream is a veritable man-trap. A man falling into it would be carried irresistibly into the cavern and through the Black Pool. He would have to be an exceptional diver or he would lose his life.

"My theory is this. Some man in the camp who had intimate knowledge of the men's accounts would single out a laborer like Petrovsky, for example, who by dint of faithful labor had accumulated, say, eighteen hundred dollars on the company books. He would watch Petrovsky—if possible get him drunk—get him separated from his mates on some pretext or other—for which purpose a woman's eyes might be called into play. A midnight tryst in the shadows with a pretty woman—rather hard for a poor, lonesome fellow with alcohol in his veins to resist, eh?"

Joe Conto, sitting by the open window, looked out at the sun setting below the gray hump of Barren Ridge. Cronkhite laughed harshly. From without came the restless stamping of a horse.

"Some fairy tale!" exclaimed the general foreman. "Expect us t' b'lieve all that, chief?"

"Your skepticism is quite natural in view of your natural ignorance," went on Mr. Robertson calmly. "You're blind to things that happen right under your nose, Cronkhite. Those men—Pavlovitch, Petrovsky, Ketchnikov, Uhlanov and O'Gorman—were thrown into that stream under cover of darkness. The only body recovered was that of Uhlanov, the absence of wounds, according to your clumsy reasoning, disproving the theory of foul play.

"You reasoned exactly the way the murderer figured you would. In fact the murderer was quite sure he was beyond the law, because if any of the bodies should happen to be recovered there would be nothing to prove that the men had not fallen in the water and been accidentally drowned.

"Finally it was a simple matter for this man who had access to the camp accounts, to draw up the dead men's time-slips and forge their signatures. This would be especially easy in the case of the Russians who, instead of signing their names, were in the habit of making their marks. These transactions, of course, would be dated a day or so prior to each victim's death.

"With the signed time-slips once in his possession the man could negotiate them at will and they would be honored by the company's treasurer at headquarters. This bares a flaw in our system of payment that I have already taken steps to have remedied. Hereafter no employee's time will be carried to his credit on the books longer than one month. All wages, excepting those of men working by contract, will be paid monthly by check."

Cronkhite stared stupidly at Joe Conto, and then his gaze rested on the white face of Vanda Capadux, who still stood silent beside Old Adam. The general foreman's lips quivered.

"It's a —— lie!" he shouted, leaping to his feet. "A hull pack o' lies! Joe an' Vanda ain't murdered anybody! Why, I've knowed 'em ——"

"Careful, Cronkhite," warned the chief. "Don't pass the lie to me. I can assure you that you're standing on the very edge of disgrace."

Cronkhite sank back on the bench, his face livid, straining to keep back the raging words that sprang to his lips. Joe Conto's black eyes were riveted on the chart that still lay on the table—particularly on the channel that the chief had traced under the rock of Barren Ridge.

"But you can't *prove* dees?" asked the clerk in a low voice, his English acquiring a strange accent due to his excitement. "Dees is merely what you call 'teeoree,' hah?"

"I can prove every word of it," asserted the chief quietly. "One of your intended victims happened to be an exceptional swimmer and diver. He came out of the pool in safety. For a laboring man he also displayed rare judgment. Instead of rousing his friends and making a hullabaloo that would have put you on your guard and probably culminated in your escape, he tramped all the way to the end of the steel and told his story. There's a man who's loyal to his job.

"He even left eight hundred dollars on the books for you to steal, so that you could be nabbed red-handed at forgery. I questioned him upon every possible point and his answers satisfied me in all particulars. Although I have never been through that black channel, I know that *he* has been, because his crude description of the currents and pressures there tallies exactly with the laws of hydrostatics.

"This man is on his way here to confront you on charges of attempted murder and forgery. You sealed your fate, Conto, when you meddled with the Irish."

The man's eyes flickered like a cornered rat's. He wet his lips with his tongue.

"You have to prove dees—dees 'black channel,' " he muttered. "Prove dees wild Ireesh tale—hah?"

His eyes flashed again to the map, resting on the course of the stream and the channel and the crevice leading from the cistern into the Black Pool. Through the open window beside him came the last rays of the setting sun. Dusk was stealing swiftly among the granite hills.

Vanda Capadux was just then staring past the stalwart guardsman through the open doorway and looking at Cronkhite's big sorrel with his bridle thrown negligently over the hitching-post. Old Adam, alternately clawing at his beard and patting the big money-bag that he had quietly tied to his belt, had his hawk eyes on Joe Conto.

"You'd better handcuff this man, sergeant," advised the chief. "In the mean time you can lock the old man and the girl in their dwelling, and close up this infernal place."

The sergeant stepped toward Joe Conto, fumbling in his pocket for handcuffs. Conto leaped for the open window above him, flinging himself recklessly through it, the bullet grazing his thigh. Vanda Capadux softly spoke one word to Old Adam—one word in a foreign tongue.

The sergeant had leaped through the window on the heels of Joe Conto. The other trooper, stationed at the rear door, had run outside with the idea of heading the fugitive off. Shots sounded in the gathering dusk.

"Stop them!" shouted the chief suddenly.

Cronkhite, dazed by the swift sequence of events, had risen undecided from the bench. The chief and the auditor started forward; but the Capaduxes had already slipped out of the unguarded door.

With an agility that one would hardly have surmised in such an ungainly frame, Old Adam had swung himself into the saddle and yanked the head of the sorrel toward the open trail. Before the horse leaped forward Vanda was behind him, riding astride, fingers clinging tenaciously to the miser's belt.

* * *

IT WAS six o'clock. Dan O'Hara's grading gang knocked off work, shouldered their picks and shovels and began the hike campward for evening grub. The sun had just dropped below the peaks that fringed the western horizon.

Down from the Barren Ridge O'Hara saw a horse come plunging through the gathering dusk. The animal swung to the left and galloped furiously toward the gang along the right-of-way. Big Dan shaded his eyes with his hand.

"Shtop thim!" he shouted suddenly to his men. " 'Tish the ould whishkers thot rruns the saloon—him an' the girrl—the both iv thim rrunnin' away wid Crronkhite's harse! There's some divilthry afoot —shtop thim!"

Dan's gang of white men were quick to respond to his command. They spread across the right-of-way, waving their implements of toil in the eyes of the galloping horse. The big sorrel, confused at the unexpected barrier, swerved toward the line of spruces that fringed the grade; but Old Adam veered him away from the danger just in time. The pick-and-shovel men dodged the frightened horse's hoofs.

The animal, amazed at the proceedings, reared on his hind feet, seeking to dismount his unusual burden. Old Adam held his seat like an Arab, and Vanda clung desperately to his belt. The sorrel again sprang forward, passing the wary pick-and-shovel men, and raced along the right-of-way toward the south.

Just then a big man who had been hiking along unnoticed, sprang forward and seized the horse's bridle, throwing his weight upon the animal's head. A dagger gleamed in the air above the intruder's breast; but in that same instant the sorrel stumbled to his knees and the miser fell across the pommel. The descending dagger was sheathed in Adam's back.

The body slumped sidewise, one claw-like hand still clutching the loop of the bridle, the other clasped about the money-bag that hung at his belt. Vanda Capadux reached swiftly for the bag, slashing at the cord with the dagger, slashing at the old man's fingers that guarded it.

"Ye hell-cat!" shouted the man who had seized the bridle. "Ye shpawn iv the divil himsilf! Ye murtherin' Jezebel!"

He caught Vanda's wrist in a powerful grip, flinging her over the crupper to the ground, holding her wrist and twisting it till the bloody weapon fell from her fingers. A moment afterward one of the troopers appeared, galloping down from the stable in pursuit of the runaways. He quickly handcuffed Vanda Capadux.

"I'd suggist, sarrgint, thot ye rub some iv the kalsomine off iv thot hell-cat's face. Belike ye will find a mon's whishkers benathe. Whin we were tusshlin', she hadn't the feel iv a woman. Lots iv min could grrow currls like thim, bedad."

Vanda Capadux suddenly strained at the bracelets, flooding the air with curses in a strange tongue. The pick-and-shovel men crowded around, open-mouthed and staring —staring first at Vanda, then at her captor, then at the body of the old miser whose fat money-bag, still hanging from his belt, was protected by bleeding fingers.

"Paddy O'Gorman!" cried the gang in wondering welcome. "Where have ye been?"

"Grrave-diggin'," responded the young Irishman solemnly, looking at the body of Old Adam, "wid me pick-an'-shoovel brrains."

"I GOT him here," remarked one of the troopers, "just as he jumped into the stream."

"Well," mused the chief, "he demanded proof of my 'theory,' didn't he? It happens that he was elected to prove it himself. He must have come through the channel, because here he is—or rather, *was*."

They looked through the deepening twilight at the body of Joe Conto, lying on the rocks by the Black Pool. A big crowd of laborers stood about, discussing the swift tragedies in awed whispers.

"That long-haired one is undoubtedly the brains of the gang," said the chief reflectively. "He could have had remarkable success on the stage as a female impersonater. How did you ever happen to get hooked by such infernal scoundrels, Cronkhite? I don't believe you had any part in the murder conspiracy—but you were certainly an easy dupe!"

The general foreman stood like a man dazed. His broad shoulders drooped. His sodden face was as lifeless as a clay mask. To the chief's question he made no reply.

"I'll cancel the plans for the curve," went on the chief. "I didn't want it in the line in the first place, but it seemed the best we could do. Now, however, we can do some real railroadin'. We'll divert this stream to its former channel and blast out this shell of rock. We'll dry up this black channel and let daylight through it. And then—hooray, boys! We'll make a tunnel out of it. Out of their underground murder trap we'll build a channel of commerce."

"AN' NOW, Paddy, belike ye're continted to come back to the pick an' shoovel an' shtay wid your own kind, afther doin' so much brrain wurrk?" queried O'Hara the grade foreman, lighting his pipe and contentedly surveying his white gang while they labored and sweated and swatted black flies on the grade.

"I am thot," assented O'Gorman, spitting on his hands and driving his pick-point through eight inches of tough clay. "I'll take it aisy for a while."

"Now how do ye soopose, Paddy," continued Big Dan curiously, "thot thim furrin divils dishcoovered the saycret iv thot chonnel?"

"How do the shnakes dishcoover the howls in the rrocks?" demanded O'Gorman scornfully. "An' thim human shnakes arre the worrst iv thim all. They'll find howls undher the foundations iv the counthry itsilf."

Big Dan was looking thoughtfully up the right-of-way.

"Kape thim picks thoompin', min!" he ordered gruffly. "Here comes the chafe ingineer."

The chief was in search of Paddy O'Gorman. He took the young man up to the general foreman's office. Cronkhite had just been found off the right-of-way, a knife sticking in his left breast. The troopers were combing the country looking for a half-breed with a mutilated face. The chief talked with O'Gorman for more than an hour.

"I know it's a big jump, Paddy," he kept repeating to the reluctant young man. "But you're strong enough and big enough to make it. That's what this job needs—fearless, fair-minded men with honest, hard-working, pick-and-shovel-brains."

THERE were three new graves in the little cemetery on Fools' Hill. Vanda Capadux—or whatever the long-haired rascal's name was—had been sent under escort to the nearest jail. A big red-mustached man, mounted on a sorrel horse, rode forth to survey his new domain. Big Dan O'Hara, always on the alert for approaching authority, glanced up the right-of-way, stared, took his pipe from his mouth, scratched his head—and then sheepishly shook it.

A slow flush deepened the tan on his homely face. He squared his shoulders and tried to look important in the eyes of his gang—but most of them were openly and shamelessly grinning. Big Dan struggled nobly with his pride and at last—won.

"Kape thim picks thoompin', min," he directed weakly. "Here comes the—the—gineral forremon."

LONG RIFLES

A FOUR-PART STORY

Part I

by
Hugh Pendexter

Author of "War Wampum," "Over the Rim of the Ridge," etc.

FOREWORD

THE GAMBLERS

IN THE Spring of 1755 the Englishman and the Frenchman were gaming again, and the red man watched them with no wish in his heart that either should win. They played at a very large green table; in truth, nothing less than continent would accommodate their stakes.

For many years the Frenchman had been accumulating his resources for this particular meeting, and to further his chances of winning had been uniting his Gulf colonies to those in Canada by a chain of posts along the Mississippi, the Ohio and the Great Lakes. Control of the Mississippi would give him control of the peltry trade—a rare purse to risk at any table.

He knew his path from Montreal to the Gulf was made safe by his posts on the Lakes and the Illinois. In developing these assets he had suffered no serious opposition, but there was the chance that some of the Englishman's friends might penetrate to the Muskingum and the Sciota and trade for a few bales of fur among the Shawnee and Delaware, kin and friends of the Red Man—now gloomily watching the cards drop.

The Frenchman knew he could eliminate all sporadic trespasses in this intermediate country by building more posts on Lake Erie, the Le Boeuf, and the Allegheny. The Frenchman contended that the Allegheny Mountains formed the natural western boundary of the Eastern colonies and that all the Western Indians should be under his control. By building up a red barrier behind the mountains he could always check the progress of the Englishman's friends on the seaboard. By depriving these colonies of any share of the fur trade he would decrease their influence in Europe. Even agriculture would sicken, for how could men sow and reap if living in constant fear of the Frenchman's red wards and compelled to stand on guard against them?

The Ohio fur trade, already lost to the Eastern colonies, amounted to forty thousand

"Long Rifles," copyright, 1923, by Hugh Pendexter.

pounds a year. Thus far the Frenchman had backed his luck, and his winnings had infused in him a desire to take a gambler's choice and risk all his gains to make a clean sweep. His father had been a gamester before him but had suffered some reverses in being credulous and superstitious. He had believed in fairies, and had backed John Law to the detriment of his gold-pieces. The son was more sophisticated. He had outgrown myths and charms and with impetuous sportsmanship was ready for the final and colossal wager—all or nothing.

The Englishman began the game in an ugly mood. His last encounter with the Frenchman at Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 had covered him with disgrace. His ruddy face burned with shame as he recalled that duel of wits. It was humiliating to remember how his adversary had so out-played him as to leave him—as his ministerial friends put it—*in statu quo ante bellum;* and no mouth-filling Latin tag could conceal his loss of more than a hundred million pounds.

That setback had been a deep thrust to his kinsmen's pride. To add insult to his losses he had been driven to deposit the Earl of Sussex and Lord Cathcart in Paris to guarantee his payment of certain I.O.U.'s, such as the surrender of title to some New World realty, namely: Cape Breton.

Seven years after the Aix-la-Chapelle affair this wound was still hurting the Englishman and whetting his hunger for revenge. And there were distant relatives of his in the colonies, living largely in the New England area, who were very wrathy at his lack of finesse, inasmuch as it had cost them their best fishing-grounds. It was openly complained by these simple folks that Big Brother John had played poorly and had been most outrageously hoodwinked by means of marked cards.

Each player longed to have the Red Man stand behind his chair and bring him luck, but the onlooker remained at one end of the table, quite impartial and quite sure he would regret the outcome, whomever it favored. In fact, the Red Man was so lacking in sportsmanship that he asked himself the incongruous question—

"Why don't they fight it out on the Big Water?"

As if such a game could be played on the ocean! Both gamesters understood the lone spectator's frame of mind and expected nothing more sensible from him. Yet, curiously enough, there was some relevancy in the Red Man's protest; for the players seemed to have overlooked the fact that the stake each was striving to win consisted of the Red Man's equity in all the land west of the Allegheny Mountains.

It is true that the Englishman's friends and kinsmen in Virginia claimed all the land at the heads of the Ohio by virtue of the original patent of James the First to the London and Plymouth companies. Incidentally this patent had been legally set aside a hundred and thirty odd years before the big game started, with Charles the First's grant to Lord Baltimore precluding any review of the matter.

Also the Englishman had kith and kin in Pennsylvania who claimed the territory on the assumption that William Penn's charter covered it. As a fact those proprietaries were empowered to buy land of the aborigines, but had failed to strike a bargain with the Red Man's relations.

The Frenchman claimed the country on the ground that the King of France in 1712 had granted all lands watered by the Wabash in the letters-patent creating the Louisiana Colony. The Englishman spiritedly retorted that his patents were all-inclusive as they extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Neither player had much idea how far beyond the Mississippi was the Pacific Ocean, or what was the nature of the country and the people in between.

All the time the grim spectator stood at the end of the table, nursing his anger and believing that neither gamester had a right to gamble for the magnificent realm west of the mountains, as neither had gone through the form of treating with the Red Man for his holdings. The two white men understood this childish pique and did not allow it to interrupt their game. It was merely an obstacle to be overcome by the winner.

The Frenchman long since had planned just how he would sooth the Red Man by building a few more posts, by bestowing upon him much paint and brandy, and some firearms. The Englishman did not propose to lessen his winnings by giving many presents, but he would push his land-loving relatives over the mountains to create new settlements, and thereby carry the blessings of civilization to the entrances of bark hut and wigwam.

It was a tremendous game, a reckless game, and a dangerous one for the loser and the Red Man. All Europe waited to learn how the cards fell. All America listened eagerly to forest-runner and mounted express to hear how each point was scored. Delaware and Shawnee, the lake tribes and the Canadian Hurons, waited and wondered which would win; for they knew they must hold fast to the chain of friendship with the winner, let him be French or English.

And as the cards were shuffled and dealt there came the faint ruffling of drums, the dull rumbling of cannon, and even the soft moccasin tread of white men carrying long rifles and used to the ways of the woods and the wiles of the Red Man.

CHAPTER I

BEGINNING THE RED ROAD

THE home-town looked the same as when I last made for Shooter's Hill, fleeing from the ignominy of being little better than a pauper. It was two years since I had been in Virginia, and there were certain outstanding debts which made it embarrassing for me to return.

While the fairs were being held in May and October all persons coming to Alexandria would be exempt from arrests and executions. The government of the colony was largely controlled by the vestries of the parishes, which in a measure held the power of civil authority. And it was not yet Maytime, and I was back without road-belts, as my red friend, the Onondaga, would style immunity from annoyance. I risked great humiliation, but there are certain things a man must do despite his pride; and I had returned because something larger than my personal welfare was concerned.

However, I consoled myself with remembering that much mountain water had flowed down the Potomac since my hasty departure, and that all the colonies were in the midst of stirring times; that the extravagances of Webster Brond would be forgotten now we were at the throat of France once more. I doubt not that there were mighty few in the colonies who welcomed the transference of the ancient quarrels between England and France to the New World, but I must confess that I was one who welcomed the upheaval.

The unusual bustle and confusion in the streets of the Virginia town would be my shield. The coming in of many strangers permitted me to remain unnoticed. So it was that my long leggings, my fringed hunting-shirt with its broad cape, my moccasins and long rifle, my ax beside the hunting-knife in my embroidered belt, gave me assurance against recognition until I should reveal my identity when I delivered my news to Governor Dinwiddie. Once my errand was finished it would require swift feet to catch me before I returned over the blue wall to the land of high adventure.

It was not from choice that I had left my Onondaga comrade over the mountains and come to town, although the old false pride which had prompted my flight had been washed out by much rough faring and many a desperate plight. It was love for the colony that had drawn me back. Perhaps there was an underlying, selfish desire to rehabilitate myself in a measure by serving my own people in the time of their danger. I prefer to think it was an affection for what was called Belle Haven before it was known as Alexandria.

Be that as it may I came fresh from Fort Du Quesne and Shanoppin, from the distant Ohio country where the English were but little known, and where the names of Drouillon, Laforce, de Villiers, Jumonville, and others of the French, already were so many war-cries among the Indians along the Monongahela and the Allegheny.

Throughout the hurried journey back to Alexandria I had told myself the past was dead, that "Black" Brond, the forest-runner, was entirely apart from young Webster Brond who had taken such pride in scrawling in his Cheever's "Latin Accidence" his name with "Gent." affixed.

And now that I was crossing the market-square and was in time to see the Northern Mail, just arrived from Richmond, draw up before the Royal George before continuing its lumbering journey over the King's post-road to the north, I felt the call of my ancestry and turned my steps to the house which my father's love for hospitality and good cheer had lost to me, along with many rich acres.

Some families are unfortunate in coats-of-arms and mottoes. My people had been inflicted with the family device of an outstretched open hand. My father by nature was congenial and convivial, prodigal with good cheer. He had only needed the appellation "Brond of the open hand" to complete his impoverishment. So many times had I seen him set forth to dispose of his crops; so many times had I greeted him on his return with only a trifle left of the season's planting! And so many times did I puff up with pride when he explained his light pockets by saying:

"It's a duty we owe the name, lad. We will plant more, but we will never be niggardly."

And so many times have I watched him peacefully reading his Bible and finding warrant for his genial extravagances in the story of the rich man and the camel and the eye of the needle! I loved him for it. I thank God that he was Brond of the open hand rather than Brond of the grasping hand. So many times as a boy have I emptied my pockets at fairs and merrymakings, at the Annapolis races, when other youngsters clustered about me and I was made known to strange youths as "the son of Brond of the open hand!" And right lavishly, so long as my pocket-money lasted, did I live up to our armorial bearings.

And the same with the little my father left me when he peacefully passed out. Always, after he left me, did his words ring in my ears—

"It's a duty we owe the name, lad. We must never be niggardly." I thank God he passed out before the crash came, that he never tasted the bitterness and that it could be I who was forced to escape petty prosecutions by flight into the wilderness. It would have broken his kind heart could he have known my estrangement from my fellows.

IT HELPED me much to find the place deserted. To have seen others there, where my father kept open house, would have grieved me sorely. I tarried before the house, and the grinning mask carved in the keystone of the door-arch leered down on me amiably even if grotesquely. Many a coming and going reveler had that fanciful decoration looked upon. More than one guest had it seen taking away much of my father's old Madeira and perhaps considerable of his gold and silver pieces. But never had it seen a debtor approach to beg for mercy; or a wayfarer turned away without a ninepence and a cup of sunshine to lighten the weary heart.

I sent my love through the paneled door and passed around to the high gate and looked into the garden. Like the house it showed the lack of human occupancy. The shrub-trees, under which my father had delighted to sit and arrange his reflections, sadly needed trimming. Ferns and weeds grew in the basin of the fountain. The roses and tulips my little mother had loved had been crowded and choked by that insolent trespasser the wild mustard. The end of the long grape-arbor, where it should have joined on to the Summer-house, was broken through.

The place was a riot of untrained growth where once orderliness and beauty had graced the winding paths. All that was left to remind me of the golden yesterdays was the aroma of the snowy cherry blossoms.

Voices close by aroused me and I turned from the gate. Despite my rough schooling from Lake Erie down to the Falls of the Ohio my heart went pit-a-patting, just as it had when I wrote her name in my schoolbooks. It was amazing to find her the same as when I saw her on that last wonderful day of my lost youth, when she had wept at my going and had permitted me to carry her young love with me.

The fellow with her had been my boon companion. His powdered wig and beruffled shirt, his knee-breeches, gold buckles and silken hose put my travel-stained garb to shame, and I was for turning back to the gate. But I saw a hint of amusement in their curious glances; and, conquering my weakness, I swept off my ragged fur hat with an almost forgotten grace and called myself more vividly to their attention. Busby stared haughtily, as if I were some freakish creature from the unknown wilds. The girl frowned in perplexity; then she recognized me despite my forest dress, and exclaimed—

"Webster Brond!"

Busby stared blankly for a moment, then smiled broadly and cried:

"Curse me if it isn't! Brond of the open hand! Where did you come from? And when did you get back? And why do you wear that Indian toggery?"

"Hush!" murmured the girl.

I affected not to hear her, nor to wince under the old title, and explained:

"I bring news for his Excellency, the governor. I am waiting for him to return from the Maryland shore. I am from Du Quesne, and the country I have covered is ill-fitted for finery."

The shadow of the war was upon us all. Her fair face flushed, and she softly cried:

"You've been to Fort Du Quesne, Webster? How romantic! Our General Braddock will soon be there. Of course you march with him."

"I shall be glad to serve as a scout." For I was in no way inclined to submit myself to stiff-necked discipline.

"Then I may see you along the road, Web. I *ride* with him," said Busby; and with that touch of superiority he ever wore even as a little chap.

Often had I laughed at his patronizing ways, and often had I forgiven him. Mayhap he caught a reminiscent twinkle in my eye; perhaps he thought I was staring too long and intently at his dainty companion, for he abruptly informed me—

"Jo and I are to be married, Webster, after General Braddock has finished his little business at Fort Du Quesne."

I smiled and went through the form of congratulating them, but there was a stab in my heart. Not that I had expected to carry a girl's love in my heart during two years of roughing it—and yet I had hoped. She was crimson and angry, and I knew she was recalling our parting.

"You should not talk that way," she coldly admonished Busby, drawing up her slim figure with quite the grand air.

"I am natural. You're artificial, Josephine," he lightly bantered. "Besides, it's not so long ago that Web used to dance with you and play with both of us."

And in the old days I was preferred over him, I bitterly told myself. Aloud I said:

"Surely you feel no foolish delicacy in letting an old friend know of your happiness. Forsooth, I'd have to know now, or not at all. This is my good-by to Alexandria."

At once she was Josephine, the girl I had known. And with wistfulness she deplored:

"I don't like that word 'good-by.' It's the saddest of all words, I think. Every thing was so peaceful and happy. And now t's war and soldiers, and all our men eager to march against the French. God give them safe return!"

Could we have but known! Could we have but foreseen the outcome of the next few weeks!

"It's nothing, this march against Fort Du Quesne," boasted Busby. "We fellows are only afraid there won't be enough fighting to make it worth the effort. Enlist at once, Web. You still have friends in Alexandria, and there'll be work for your long rifle. We Virginians are down for a pretty slice of country for our trouble. A big land-grant can restore a fallen fortune, you know." And he darted me a knowing glance.

"As a scout you might be overlooked, like a wagoner. With new acres you could——"

He caught Josephine's eye and paused, suddenly embarrassed. To help him out I jerked my head toward the empty house and forlorn garden and completed:

"—build up a new family fortune. I go as a scout if I go, Busby. Braddock will find he needs scouts from all I have learned. As for land, the Ohio Land Company will give me a tidy parcel. It owes me a good turn for the work I did at the Falls of the Ohio. I can pick up land in many places."

"A born roamer," Busby sighed. "You should think of settling down and founding a family."

This, rather smugly, as if he were speaking of founding a college, like William and Mary's. I knew they both had the same thought—my flight to escape the consequences of debts which I could not pay; likewise, what might happen to shame me once my presence in town became known. In the days of our play along Great Hunting Creek Busby's thoughts had always pridefully dwelt on his family, albeit it was no better than my own, or several others that had settled just north of Alexandria Creek when the town was known as Belle Haven.

Mistress Josephine feared her small feet were roaming in treacherous places and made me a little curtsy as a signal for her companion to be moving. I saluted them and wondered if she had forgotten the dancing-parties, when she had been pleased to have me a partner in contre-danse and minuet. Busby was inclined to shake hands and instinctively obeyed his English blood by starting to do so, then contented himself with a ceremonious bow. The little lady saw everything, and with impuslive frankness, which ever characterized her kind heart—once she managed to forget her brocades and patches and the hairdresser's art—she advanced as Busby fell back.

Seizing my hand for a brief moment she softly murmured:

"We were very young. I did not know. Look out for him on the march."

And with another hurried little curtsy she was walking out of my life, with Busby mumbling and muttering in her small ear—possibly asking to be told what confidences she had imparted to me.

I WAS leaning against the gate and looking after them, a most comely couple, and feeling very ancient and out of place, when a vestryman fussily accosted me and warned me against trespassing on the garden which had been my father's and mother's.

It was old Hickmore and he was filled with the importance that some vestrymen feel. He looked just the same as he had when I was a boy, and he was lecturing me for poaching in the Carlyle gardens. He was more of an institution than a human being, and never could I imagine him in love and striving with the odds and ends of the average life. For the minute I felt very young and almost hung my head. He did not recognize me, and I did not make myself known to him. To escape a lecture on the evils of forest-running and the discomfiture resulting from my debts I silently said farewell to the house of the open hand and turned back to the market-square.

I have said the town was the same; and so it was so far as the yellow, white and red chimneys were concerned, for there was the same proportion of slim and fat ones. And there was the same display of quaint roof architecture; the hipped, the gambreled, and the gabled. The sycamores and lindens along the streets had changed none; and looking down the slope to the river I beheld the same row of warehouses filled with the far-famed Oronoko tobacco and Maryland grain. At Point Lumley, at the foot of Duke Street, workmen were building the foundation for yet another.

Over the tops of the warehouses showed the masts of vessels, just as of old. With a rush of boyish recollection I watched a swarthy, bare-footed sailor, gaily turbaned and wearing a red sash, his ears sagging with the weight of huge hoop earrings. He was heavily laden with rum from an open market-stall; and in the old days Busby and I would have called him a survivor of the Red Seamen, and would have made a game out of him, and would have made ourselves believe he had dropped into port to make sure the ancient pirate treasure was still intact at the foot of Shooter's Hill, or on Hunting Creek.

But it was in physical aspect alone that the town remained unchanged, for the life of the streets was vastly different. I envied the enthusiasm of the little boys who were trying to see it all. There were cannon along the wharf, and there were cannon hauled up to the post-road. There was a frantic passing back and forth of a new population. As I loitered before the Royal George I was crowded and jostled rudely by a great bustling of people.

At Gadsby's across the way—built three years before by Lord Fairfax from English brick—was the same lively animation. Officers in rich uniforms were constantly coming and going. Young subalterns, with great importance, were harshly demanding passageway. Squads of soldiers in scarlet coats—scarlet for an Indian campaign when the forest was all a lush green—were being maneuvered about the square under the hoarse guidance of veteran sergeants. The long rifle I was leaning upon—made by William Henry of Lancaster, soon to be Braddock's armorer—was in decided contrast to the Brown Bess carried by the over-seas soldiery. Surely this was the finest army England had ever sent across the Atlantic, and most surely there was nothing at Du Quesne to prevent the capture of the French fort.

And yet experience was teaching us of the colonies that the English musket was not an effective weapon in the deep woods. At a sad price we had learned that a certainty of aim was all-necessary when dealing with a hidden foe, who would only at the most show a small part of his anatomy, and who could silently release arrow after arrow with much precision.

These soldiers of Braddock's, so confident of overrunning the heads of the Ohio, were not taught to aim their weapons, but to point them in the general direction of the enemy and to discharge them in volleys. We of the woods considered every human target we fired at to be a distinct problem; and God knows the target was small enough when consisting of Huron, or any of the Far Indians, or even the French who had campaigned with the red savages.

I asked for information of a gaping townsman, and with slow appraisal of my forest dress he briefly told me that General Braddock was the guest of Mr. Carlyle and was continuously presiding over a council at the Carlyle House, where the governors of five colonies were conferring with him. When I pressed him with questions about the troops he unwillingly interrupted his staring long enough to tell me that some provincials and six companies of the Forty-fourth regiment, with Sir Peter Halket commanding, had already set out for Winchester, and that the men now filling the square with crimson belonged to the Forty-eighth, Colonel Dunbar commanding.

"The Forty-eighth marches tomorrow, 'tis said. Now the war will be ended before it is hardly begun. Praise God and protect his Majesty the King," he completed.

THERE was a rattle of wheels, and my monitor jerked about and bared his head and stared in worshipful homage. It was General Braddock, riding in the coach he had bought of Governor Sharpe of Maryland. He was escorted by a bodyguard of light horse, and the brave spectacle was pleasing to one long used to the monotony and silence of the forest.

I barely glimpsed him, a heavy, stolid man, whose strong visage seemed to lower on the gaping onlookers. Then he was gone, commander-in-chief of all his Majesty's forces in North America. He impressed me as being self-willed and self-dependent, and one who would be intolerant of any advice. It was commonly known that he was displeased at the manner in which the campaign was progressing—rather, failing to progress. The capture of Fort Du Quesne was not bothering him, but to get his army under way was proving to be a most irritating problem. Nor could one blame him for the needless delays, the lack of funds, the wrangling between the colonies.

Sir John St. Clair, deputy-quartermaster general of all his Majesty's forces in America, rode at the wheel, and was leaning from the saddle to address his chief. Perhaps he was relating again his canoe trip from Will's Creek down the Potomac; and repeating his belief that he could blast a passage for the flat-boats through the Great Falls.

But we all knew how General Braddock had failed to comprehend local conditions. He seemed unable to grasp the fact, which we of America all knew—namely, that the great mass of Pennsylvania citizens was opposed to any system of taxation that did not include the proprietaries; and that the Quakers were averse to voting any money for military purposes. He only knew that promised supplies were lacking, that recruits were coming in very slowly, and that the Indians thus far had not joined his army. More than once he had complained to the assembled governors that he was "unable to express his indignation."

I worked my way into the tap-room of the Royal George and made bold to put a question to a young subaltern. He eyed me haughtily, and then began to admire my leggings and fringed shirt, the nearest he had yet come to Indian life, and in a low voice, so as not to destroy his dignity, began to babble questions. Had I really seen wild Indians? Had I killed any? Was it true the savages cooked and ate all their prisoners? At last I satisfied his greediness and finally learned what I had desired.

Governor Dinwiddie had returned from the Maryland shore and was at the Carlyle House together with others of the council. They were holding the last conference before the army marched.

Quitting the Royal George I hastened to conclude my business. The lumbering coach had disappeared by the time I reached the Carlyle House, but the horses of the escort were tethered under the double row of Lombardy poplars and I knew the council was still in session.

I was acquainted with the house inside and out, and it had changed none during my absence. It was built of Portland stone, procured in the Isle of Wight in exchange for Mr. Carlyle's famous Oronoko tobacco, and would weather centuries. As a youth it had held my imagination because of the dungeons and subterranean passage to the river. The latter was for use in event of an overwhelming Indian attack, and Mr. Carlyle, a most gracious, kindly man, had permitted us boys to explore it and make it figure prominently in some of our games. Once on a dare from Busby I had climbed out of a dormer-window and crawled among the heavy-shouldered chimneys and was severely lectured by the owner. The balustrade of fat stanchions along two sides of the roof had entangled more than one kite-string.

When not woods-faring and hunting pirate treasure we boys would lounge on the back double porches behind the wisteria vines and watch the vessels drop down the river to begin their mysterious errands; or as they were warped to the wharf to the accompaniment of throaty sailor chanting. And how we had speculated on whence they came! What wondrous dreams we made up as to their next port! The Carlyle House was second only to my old home in quickening memories.

I advanced toward the dark door and quickly found a bayonet disputing my approach, with the sentinel growling for me to halt. His sidelong glance at my rifle was ill-favored. My fringed shirt and leggings did not meet with his approval.

"I have news for his Excellency, Governor Dinwiddie," I told him.

"This is General Braddock's headquarters. Go back to the road, you woods-rat," he commanded.

"I have news for General Braddock," I persisted.

He advanced the bayonet and, red with anger, I leaped back to escape being pricked. He came on as I retreated; and in this humiliating manner I was being driven from the portal-arch and its massive carved frame when a familiar voice asked an explanation. The sentinel stared over my shoulder sullenly but still kept his bayonet at my breast.

Without turning my head I explained:

"I am Webster Brond, Mr. Carlyle. I have news for the council if I am permitted to give it."

Mr. Carlyle stepped forward and said to the soldier:

"I know this young man. He is one of our citizens and he comes from the western country. The council will wish to hear what he has to say."

But the red-coat knew his orders—and therein was a good soldier—and he would not give in an inch until a superior had passed on my application. He bawled out, and a sergeant appeared on the scene, and Mr. Carlyle repeated his indorsement of me. The sergeant ordered the sentinel back to his post and told us we were at liberty to proceed.

Even now, however, the master of the house must wait on the iron rule of his illustrious guest's guards. We were halted just inside the entrance of the cool, spacious hall while Mr. Carlyle patiently explained my business for the third time. I could look into the great gold-and-white drawing-room, the scene of many a fête, but the door of the smaller and daintier blue-and-white apartment across the hall was closed. It was in there that General Edward Braddock was endeavoring to ascertain what was the matter with the campaign and why his Majesty's affairs should continue in such an infernal muddle.

From my brief glimpse of him, and—I am ashamed to confess this—from my experience with his sentinels I was prejudiced against him. By the talk of people I knew he was given to gaming and carousing in private life, but these were human weaknesses and biased me none. I also knew from hearsay that he was always arrogant and self-opinionated and a most rigid martinet, qualities I could never esteem. But in justice to the man I must add that he was without fear and well-trained in military science as taught by war in Europe.

His name, however, was unknown in British history until this war of 1755, and it was destined to be preserved so long as history is written by one of the most amazing and disastrous defeats ever inflicted upon British arms. But of the last we in Alexandria on that sweet Spring morning never dreamed.

Word was carried inside and after several minutes, during which I heard the clinking of glasses and the muffled giving of a toast, an officer opened the door and motioned for me to enter. I had expected Mr. Carlyle to accompany me, but he was not included in the invitation. He gave me a smile and a nod and passed down the hall and out into the gardens.

My conductor motioned for me to halt just inside the door and await the pleasure of the august commander of all the king's soldiers in America. General Braddock—of Irish descent say many, but his name is

Saxon, "Broad-oak"—had Governor Dinwiddie on his right hand and Governor De Lancey, of New York, on his left. The others around the board were Governors Shirley of Massachusettes, Sharpe of Maryland, Dobbs of North Carolina, Morris of Pennsylvania. Near the foot of the table were Commodore Keppel, Sir John St. Clair, and a prominent citizen I had seen several times in Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin. Through the open window came the soft lap-lap of the Potomac, as soft and monotonous as when we children planned our mimic wars.

None paid any attention to me beyond a passing glance from those facing the door. It is very possible some of them took me to be an Indian, or a half-blood; for among the forest folks I was known as Black Brond, and wind and sun had burned and tanned my skin until, on first glance, I was as much of a red man as Round Paw of the Wolf Clan, my Onondaga friend. Mr. Franklin was warning General Braddock against his long-drawn-out line being taken by surprize. General Braddock did not relish the admonition and haughtily replied—

"The savages may be a formidable enemy to your raw militia, sir, but on the king's regiments and disciplined troops it is impossible that they can make any impression."

I thought of the red-coats, and the flintlocks discharged in blind volleys, and wondered. The general passed the decanter and after the glasses were filled he gave—

"To the Guards; who will soon raise the flag of Old England over the fort now called Du Quesne."

After this ceremony was finished Governor Dinwiddie leaned from his chair and scrutinized me closely, smiled slightly, and said:

"General Braddock, I believe I recognize an Alexandrian in the young man waiting to report. Doubtless he brings fresh news."

Braddock turned his heavy gaze on me, frowning slightly at what to him was an untidy and rather atrocious apparel, and nodded for me to speak. I produced a written communication from George Croghan, given me by him the night I stopped at his place on Aughwick Creek. It was addressed to Governor Morris and I placed it on the table.

His Excellency opened it and read it aloud. It stated that ten thousand pounds given in presents to the Indians at Will's Creek and in their villages would tie every savage in Pennsylvania to England, provided that the gifts were accompanied by a plausible explanation of England's designs on the western country. Such liberality, declared Croghan, would "see the scalp of every Frenchman at the heads of the Ohio smoking in wigwams in Shamokin, or hanging on poles in Shenango."

"Ten thousand pounds to red savages!" rumbled General Braddock, and he smashed his fist on the table and set the glasses to dancing. "Good ——! Does the fellow think his gracious Majesty can dump endless gold into these colonies? The only way we can secure funds for moving the army is to levy a tax on all his Majesty colonies in America. Virginia has *granted* twenty thousand pounds, Pennsylvania five thousand, North Carolina eight thousand, Maryland six thousand. But all the American money to reach me is less than six thousand pounds sterling from Carolina.

"And this man Croghan talks of giving ten thousand pounds to savages on the chance of winning their favor! The sooner the savages understand that his Majesty sends bayonets, not pounds, to all who oppose his will on this continent, the faster we will proceed with our business. Ten thousand pounds! Pennsylvania has refused us wagons, horses, food and even a road to the back settlements!"

With much dignity Mr. Franklin replied that Virginia and Maryland were to furnish wagons and horses, and that Pennsylvania had not been informed that more were wanted than had been received. As for the road, a committee already was surveying it. He expressed his regret that the expedition had not landed in Pennsylvania, where every farmer had a wagon. With much cheerfulness he promised to secure the necessary vehicles and stock and said they would be ready when wanted.

Sir John St. Clair, who had served in a Hussar regiment in Europe, and who was now wearing his Hussar uniform, breathed hard and vowed he could obtain the wagons and horses from the German farmers in the back counties should Mr. Franklin fail. Sir John impressed me as being a man of much temper, and I believed he would have liked nothing better than to use old-world methods in collecting whatever the army needed.

"If my appeal does not at once bring

results then you shall try your way, Sir John," said Mr. Franklin. "But let us see if the young man has anything more to report."

General Braddock favored me with another slow gaze. He mumbled—

"What an appearance!"

Governor Dinwiddie hastily encouraged me.

"Mr. Brond, tell us briefly but frankly what you have observed on the Ohio (meaning the Allegheny)."

I rapidly stated:

"Du Quesne is temporarily under the command of Captain Beaujeu, of the marines. He has under him about one hundred and fifty Canadians and less than a hundred regulars. His Indians number between six hundred and a thousand, but they come and go in such a fashion that it's hard to give their number with any exactness. Beaujeu is heaping many gifts on the Iroquois there in the hope of drawing the Long House into the war on the side of France. The Indians are nervous and afraid to fight. They have been told our army will number many thousands. If it were not for Pontiac, leader of the Ottawas and Ojibways, Captain Jacobs and Shingis of the Delawares, many of the Indians would throw down the hatchet and return to their villages.

"The fort can not stand a siege and will not attempt it. Pennsylvania men in the back settlements fear a press, and to avoid being impressed as privates many are enlisting in the northern forces. Captain Beaujeu fears that William Johnson will succeed in holding the New York Iroquois neutral even if he is not able to enlist them for active service in the Crown Point and Niagara expeditions."

"How is that you know what this Beaujeu thinks, sirrah?" harshly interrupted General Braddock.

I explained how I had passed myself off at the fort as a Canadian forest-runner and how my Onondaga friend had been accepted as a French Indian. The general stared at me suspiciously and demanded—

"Who vouches for this man, who talks French and fools an officer of the marines?"

Governor Dinwiddie promptly endorsed me. Governor Morris added that George Croghan would never intrust a communication to one whom he did not know to be a loyal subject of his Majesty.

The general dropped his head and stared at his empty glass. As they seemed to be waiting for me to continue I said:

"It's commonly believed in Pennsylvania that Carlisle would be vastly better as a frontier station than Will's Creek as it is more accessible to Philadelphia and other centers of supplies. It is also believed that had his Majesty's troops landed at Philadelphia the march to the heads of the Ohio would be shortened by six weeks and would save at least forty thousand pounds."

Governor Morris nodded an affirmation of this, but the general testily broke in:

"Enough of provincial fault-finding. It's very plain the people of Pennsylvania do not care to bear any of the burdens of this campaign. Maryland and Virginia have promised two hundred and fifty wagons and eleven hundred beeves, and thus far have delivered twenty wagons and two hundred poor horses. The provisions received from Maryland are worthless—broken-down horses and spoiled rations!"

"I have vouched for horses and wagons," quietly reminded Mr. Franklin.

Governor Dobbs remonstrated:

"The colonies should not be too deeply blamed. When it became known that General Braddock was to conduct the campaign all the colonies accepted it as a fact that the fall of France was at hand, and in sharing this common conviction they have failed to exert themselves to their utmost."

Governor Morris further mollified the irascible commander by saying:

"I will send George Croghan a letter, directing him to start belts to the lake tribes. He stands next to William Johnson in comprehending Indian nature and in influence over them. If any man can bring in the Delawares, the Shawnees, Wyandots, Twightwees (Miami) and the Piankashaws it is Croghan."

"When I last talked with Mr. Washington he informed me there were three hundred Iroquois, who left the Ohio last Winter, and who are now ready to march with us," said Braddock, his face losing some of its dour expression.

I glanced at Governor Morris and fancied I detected symptoms of uneasiness. He knew what I was thinking, and, while he much disliked at that time to dash any of Braddock's hopes, he announced:

"I regret, sir, that the Iroquois you mention are no longer under our control. Pennsylvania fed them from the latter part of last year until this Spring. My last advice from Philadelphia is that the Assembly has voted to go to no further expense in their behalf and that the Indians have returned to the French."

It was disheartening news for the leader to hear. I do not know that I would have imparted it had Governor Morris kept silent. And yet it would have been deadly wrong to have blinded the general to the truth of the situation. I could have told him it was too late to send belts to the lake tribes; but as that was my belief and not an established fact my conscience permitted me to keep my mouth shut.

"Was there ever such a country!" exclaimed General Braddock glaring down the table like a bear trapped in a pit. With a mouth-filling oath he entered upon a tirade against the Pennsylvania Assembly. He had cause for his wrath. His language did not offend Governor Morris, however, who had had too many quarrels with the Assembly himself to feel hurt when that body was attacked. After Braddock had finished, his Excellency with much dignity said—

"I can only do what I can do."

"And after all, sir," soothed Mr. Franklin, "Fort Du Quesne will fall to General Braddock's veterans and not because of the waivering allegiance of the natives. The tribes are with us today and accept presents from France tomorrow. And on another day they will come back to us. The truth of the matter is, sir, the Indians favor neither English nor French, and would heartily rejoice if the two races would cut each other's throats until not a white man was left in North America."

This speech made an impression, and Braddock agreed:

"Aye. There's sound sense in that. We must depend upon the army. Thank God the guards have never failed England and his Majesty!"

I will say now that there were but two men in all the colonies of whom General Braddock unqualifiedly approved—young Mr. Washington whom I had known in happier days, and Mr. Franklin. Mr. Washington, despite his youth—twenty-three years of age—had been requested to serve on Braddock's staff with the rank of major. He was very bold in opposing the general's plans when he perceived they were based on strategy learned on the battlefields of Europe, but not at all suited to our wild forests and mountains. Mr. Franklin was a magician in expedients, and without any show of bluster could blaze a trail around what appeared to be impassable obstacles.

General Braddock remembered I was still in the room and said something to Governor De Lancey. His Excellency asked me—

"Do you believe you could visit Du Quesne again and pass yourself off as a Canadian?"

I believed that I could, and said so. Then his Excellency proceeded to question me closely as to the physical conditions of the fort. Stepping to the table and using my finger and a pool of spilled wine I marked out the parallelogram, the four sides approximately facing the four points of the compass, and showed how the bastions of squared logs at the corners gave it a polygonal appearance. With dots of wine I indicated the structures inside the fort and was marking out the twelve-foot stockade on the riverside when the general curtly interrupted:

"We understand enough of that. We shall learn all the details after we have taken over the fort. You will proceed to the fort and learn if the French have received any reinforcements. As you will travel much faster than the army you are to secure enlistments among the provincials while traveling to and from the fort."

He dismissed me with a flirt of his thick hand, and as I was being shown into the hall he took up the problem of the road that Pennsylvania was supposed to lay out from the mouth of the Juniata to the Turkey-foot, or the forks of the Youghiogeny. As the door closed I heard his heavy voice rise and exclaim—

"The Assembly granted eight hundred pounds for building a road that Captain Hogg reports will at the least cost three thousand."

Governor Morris slipped into the hall after me and requested me to wait while he wrote a letter to Croghan, I to be the bearer.

There are men of high station with whom I feel free to talk, but there was something chilling and repelling about General Braddock. I almost believed he would blame the bearer of bad news. It was his firm conviction that the best of our riflemen were much inferior to his drill-sergeants. He did not seem to comprehend the difference between fighting in our gloomy forests and on a level, open field in Flanders.

He was about sixty years of age the time I stood before him in the blue-and-white room, and the caste of the Coldstream Guards was deeply etched on his soul. He and his father together had served a total of seventy years in the guards.

There were jail-scourings aplenty in other regiments, especially in troops sent to America, where service was obnoxious. But no loose recruiting was permitted in the guards. A lieutenant-colonel of the line did not hesitate to accept inferior rank in an organization which boasted a field-marshal for colonel. England's generalissimo could enjoy himself in dubious company at gleek and passage, but let one speak of the Coldstream Guards without due reverence and that person in Braddock's estimation was a blasphemer.

His contempt for our riflemen was complete. Tell him they could whip the French and outwit the Indians and he would sneer at them because they were unable to go through their drill. Hyde Park dexterity in the manual of arms weighed more with him than the keenest knowledge of forest lore.

I was peopling the broad stairway with beautiful women from my boyhood's recollections, and was again admiring their imported brocades and velvets and marveling at their fashions in hair-dressing when his Excellency finished his letter, and announced:

"Here it is, Mr. Brond. See that it gets to Mr. Croghan either by your own hand or by some trusty messenger. Be careful while at Du Quesne. We move a bit lamely now, but it'll be the ——'s own stew for the French once we get the pot to boiling. Good luck on your travels and bring back your own hair."

* * *

I PREFERRED the river-bank to the crowded tavern as sleeping-place that night. My business from Braddock gave me immunity from any annoyance by the civil authorities, and there were homes of old friends that would have opened to me had I made myself known. I had thought to make my camp in the neglected garden of the Brond house, but the ghosts were too many, and I got no farther than the gate.

Early astir, I ate at a market-stall on the square near the Horse Market. The place was lively with the rolling of drums and the clumping of heavy brogans as the regulars with wonderful precision, swung into various formations. The provincials made a poor showing beside the guards, and I sympathized with them and was glad I was not under discipline. The poor fellows had enlisted for the one purpose of whipping the French, and they had small patience with the exactions of the drill-sergeants.

"Three pun, young man, to serve his gracious Majesty. Be taken good care of while in the service. A fine scarlet coat and a fine new musket," hoarsely said a recruiting-sergeant for one of the Independent companies.

I shook my head and finished my meal. Muttering a malediction upon me for being a poor-spirited lout he stalked away to find better timber. His company, while not ranking with the regular line, was supported in America at England's expense. It was drawn up on Cameron Street. The Forty-eighth was forming on Duke Street.

The march to Frederick, Maryland, was about to begin. As there was no road from that town to Will's Creek, Colonel Dunbar would have to cross the Potomac at the mouth of the Conococheague and take the Winchester road. A detachment of thirty sailors aroused my interest as it seemed so incongruous for deep-sea men to be fighting in our American forests. And yet the land forces of the French in the new world were composed of the marines, and they were keen enough at the game.

But my business was finished in Alexandria, and trailing my long rifle I passed once more by the house of the open hand, and started north. Clear of the town I stopped on a slight eminence and looked back and watched the cloud of dust redden in the sunlight. It hung low and settled on the meadows and robbed the first grass of its rich sheen. I caught the strains of the "Grenadiers' March," and my heart beat fast at the brave rolling of the drums.

Then came the clattering of horses and the jingling and rattling of polished accouterments, and a gallant company of horsemen, including some thirty Alexandrians, was proudly passing my position. I saw young Busby, immeasurably pleased to figure in the colorful dramatic scene. I heard the faint cries of townsmen shouting God-speeds and repeating their belief that the French were already whipped.

Next came the column of foot, the

gaitered legs moving as one, the scarlet coats defying the heavy dust. Behind them came the provincials, disorderly in formation, swinging along like Indians, lean, sinewy men who understood the traps of the forest. And they were awkward only when trying to obey the orders bawled at them by their officers.

At last the march on Fort Du Quesne had commenced, and we were off to have it out with the Frenchman. And sickening of the dust I picked up my rifle, struck through a noble grove of oaks and started to find my friend, the Onondaga, Round Paw of the Wolf Clan.

CHAPTER II

DER HEXENKOPF

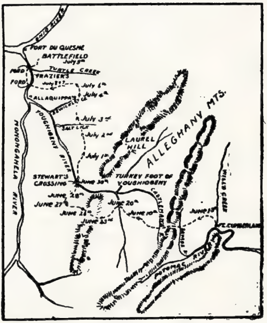
THERE was no rolling of drums, nor clanking of arms now. The low grumbling of thunder back in the hills took the place of rumbling cannon. Nor were there brave banners, nor scarlet coats; only the endless green of the forest. For I was clear of the army's road and had seen two men only between Goose Creek and what we afterwards called Snicker's Gap.

After passing through the Blue Ridge at this point I felt as if my visit to Alexandria had taken place in a dream. What would old Hickmore, the fussy vestryman, do out here on the edge of the wilderness? Bend his aged knees and beg of me not to forsake him? I believed so. No place here for gay coats and ruffled shirts and silken hose; and what mockery would the undergrowth make of my dainty lady's exquisite attire!

A buzzard quartered the sky, and I knew there would be many of them before long following the army. I ran into a migration of gray squirrels, innumerable, which neither creeks nor timber could stop; and they were thin and their skins hung loosely. They came from the west, and although such migrations were not uncommon on our frontiers my friend, the Onondaga, would have found an evil omen in their mad scramble to the east.

I was beyond the border settlements and consequently saw no honey-bees; for until the white man came there would be few flowers to provide them food. I was at the beginning of the region where solitude oppressed the newcomer, but which I had learned to love. Ahead I should find life carniverous and not dependent on man for food. I would find the panther, the wolf, the eagle and the owl, but no song-birds, or domesticated animals.

Where chanced to stand a lonely cabin you would hear no man whistling about his work, nor calling loudly to his cattle. Even a dog in such an isolated home would refrain from barking. For it was well for civilization to move softly when first intruding upon the primitive.


OHIO RIVER
FORT DU QUESNE
BATTLEFIELD July 9th
TURTLE CREEK
FORD
FRAZIER'S
FORD
July 7th
July 6th
July 4th
ALLAQUIPPA'S
SEWICKLEY CR.
July 3rd
SALT LICK
July 2nd
July 1st
YOUGHIOGENY RIVER
MONONGAHELA RIVER
LAUREL HILL
ALLEGHANY MTS.
STEWART'S CROSSING
June 30th
TURKEY FOOT OF YOUGHIOGENY
June 28th
June 27th
June 21st
June 23rd
June 20th
June 10th
June 15th
CASTLEMAN'S
WILLS CREEK
FT. CUMBERLAND
POTOMAC RIVER

The service-trees were in bloom and the sweet little flowers gave my silent way a touch of softness. When forced to skirt a patch of fallen timber I saw blackberry bushes and wild-plum trees. In the bottoms were the vines of the Winter grape ready to trip the careless foot, while on the highlands was the tangled mesh of the Autumn grape to impede the step. Black and red haws and pawpaws grew along the creeks, and the stanch little wild crab-apple held its own wherever it could be sure of water.

After I left the gap and traveled toward the camp of the Onondaga I had for companionship the tapping of wood-peckers, the chattering of squirrels, the gobble of wild turkeys and the weird night-talk of the owl. However, if domesticity were lacking there was a silence and spaciousness about the land that gradually takes possession of man. It pricked the imagination to know one could walk in the forest gloom to the far-off Mississippi; and beyond that mighty, lonely river none knew the extent of the unpeopled leagues and the obstacles waiting to be overcome.

A year or two before I was born my father could have truthfully said that the people of Virginia knew hardly anything about the Allegheny Mountains, and that even the sources of the Potomac, the Roanoke and even the Shenandoah were unknown, except as woodsmen might say they headed in the same mountains with a branch of the Mississippi.

At the time of my birth knowledge stopped and ignorance began two hundred and fifty miles from the coast. While among the lake tribes, I heard strange stories about the native races beyond the Mississippi. Some of them were represented as having tails. My companion, the Onondaga, believed this and said they were half-man, half-bear.

ROUND PAW of the Wolf Clan barely glanced up as I stood beside his small fire, and yet he had discovered me coming or else he would not have been seated with his scarlet blanket covering him from head to foot. I dropped on the ground and laid aside my rifle. He filled and lighted his pipe and passed it through the blue smoke. After a few whiffs I returned it. Finally he remarked—

"My white brother has come from the home of his father."

"My father is a ghost. There is no home for me in Alexandria. My father's house belongs to another."

He was silent for a few minutes; then asked—

"Did the English or the French take it away from him?"

It was difficult to make him understand how it was a lack of thrift and a great love of hospitality that had left me without a roof-tree. As I was deciding my efforts were futile he nodded and contemptuously remarked:

"He was like a Delaware. He traded his land for red cloth and rum."

This rubbed against the grain.

"The Delawares have thrown off their petticoats and have said they will no longer be women. They say once more they are the grandfathers of all nations."

This reminder of how the Leni-lenape had recently thrown off the Iroquois dominion, after enduring it with all its humiliations since 1720, was a dig at my friend's savage pride. His eyes smoldered, but his voice was calm and passionless as he retorted:

"Our *nephews* grow bold when they get among the French and drink brandy. They have been drunk. They will be sober. Soon we shall send our old men among them to collect strings of wampum for the Long House, and they will run about in fear of one aged warrior as a rabbit runs from a tree-cat."

I knew better. Never again would the Delawares put on petticoats and confess themselves unworthy to bear arms. We smoked in silence for some time, then Round Paw said:

"We sit here like old men resting on their mats in the sun. You carry belts for Onas?"*

"I carry a talking-paper to George Croghan," I told him, tapping the breast of my hunting-shirt. "The big chief from over the stinking water has asked me to get men with long rifles for his army. And I have said I would go to Du Quesne again. Does the man of the Wolf go with me?"

He rose and allowed his blanket to drop down to his loins. During my absence he had repainted in white the paw on his chest, the totem mark of his clan, and he was oiled for war. I knew he was eager to be deep in the forests beyond the Alleghanies and was even now ready to start. Although leg-tired I did not unpack my blankets, but signified my readiness to travel. He produced some smoked meat and parched corn for me to eat and after I had finished he made up his travel-bundle, and we were off.

"Croghan will be at Aughwick, or Will's Creek," I said. "While looking for him I will try to get long rifles for the big chief."

"He will be where the Big Knives camp, or along the Carlisle road."

He held north, and I judged that we would strike the Pennsylvania border near Conococheague Creek. I remarked as much.

"McDowell's Mill," he grunted over his shoulder. "Good place to look for Croghan's trail and for long rifles."

---

* The governor of Pennsylvania.

As I walked behind him, as much of an Indian in appearance as he if not for my disheveled hair, I described the gallant appearance of the army as it marched out of Alexandria. His only comment was:

"Big noise. The Swannock—Englishmen—can not shoot with drums."

I answered that the soldiers would have no chance to use their guns because of the weak condition of the fort and garrison. A year earlier, when Mr. Washington marched out of Fort Necessity, the situation might have been different. Then Du Quesne was garrisoned by close to a thousand men under the command of veterans.

Twelve months had seen a change in conditions. The portage at Niagara had slowed up the arrival of stores from Canada. The horses expected from Presqu' Isle had not been delivered. The garrison had been weakened by the sending back of troops to Canada.

Those bringing supplies from Canada arrived attired in rich velvets and genial from rare wines, but with their sacks empty. Waste and confusion had blighted the fine spirit of Du Quesne's defenders. When ladies' slippers and damask shoes, silk stockings and stuffs of silk, were allowed to take up precious space then it was settled that many must go hungry and some must die. I had learned this much from Captain Beaujeu who had readily accepted me as a loyal Frenchman.

Round Paw was never a gossip. We had traveled together for two years and there had been many days when he barely spoke. We first met on Lake Erie's southern shore when a pack of Hurons and a few Frenchmen were giving me a hard run and on the point of catching me. It was Round Paw's fierce war-cry, the terrible defiance of the Onondagas, and his deadly arrows that had caused my pursuers to slow up the chase, fearing an ambuscade.

During our visit to Du Quesne Round Paw had posed as a Caughnawauga Mohawk and had played the rôle excellently until Friar Denis Baron, a Franciscan, chaplain of the fort and one of the first to chant the service of Rome in the Chapel of Our Lady's Assumption on the Beautiful River, attempted to examine him on the state of his soul. His pagan mind would have rebelled against posing as a converted Mohawk, and I managed to correct his fault just in time to keep my scalp growing on my head. It was my danger, not his, that induced him to continue his rôle, and even then I was forced to bribe him with several surreptitious drinks of brandy.

In silent companionship we followed the valley of the Shenandoah and crossed the Potomac two miles west of the Conococheague and made camp in a grove of oaks. While the squirrels were broiling over the coals Round Paw again renewed the white paint on his chest. It struck me as peculiar that he should be so persistent in making himself fit for war when for once the western country was safe for the English and with but little likelihood of the French and their red allies ever being able to bring us the red hatchet.

The campaigns against Crown Point and Niagara might fail for a time, but the conquest of Du Quesne was assured. With that stronghold in our hands we should be freed from fear from the heads of the Ohio to Lake Erie. Even those Indians in western Pennsylvania who were inclined to help the French dare not take the war-path until they knew the outcome of Braddock's expedition. So, if ever there was a time when the back-country settlers felt warranted in staying by their Spring crops and leaving the block-houses unoccupied it was now. Yet Round Paw kept his paint fresh and was most particular in dressing his hair.

At the risk of violating his sense of etiquette I remarked on the uselessness of it all. I was smoking a pipe of Oronoko and watching him crouching before the small mirror to get the benefit of the sun's last rays. Without ceasing his labors he told me:

"Onas and Onontio—the governor of Canada—are on a red path that is very long. More than one hunting-snow—mid-October—will come before the hatchet is buried."

I did not believe it.

WE WERE up at sunrise and soon had crossed the creek and turned north to make McDowell's place. We had covered a mile or so when we came upon a most interesting spectacle. Two men, with horse-bells around their necks and their arms tied behind them, were harnessed together with rawhide thongs, and were being driven like a team of horses by a tall, ungainly youth. The driver held the lines in one hand and flourished a drover's long whip in the other. His light reddish hair escaped in all directions from his ragged fur hat and gave him the appearance of being hugely surprized.

His prisoners, unable to save themselves from the briars and low-hanging branches, presented a most wobegone picture. Their faces were scratched raw and their eyes were rolling in despair and fear. On discovering us the young man applied the whip vigorously to his prisoners' legs, making them jump and howl. The Onondaga halted and displayed a lively interest. Captives and scalps appealed to him.

"The Swannock is brave. He has caught two Frenchmen. He will boil them in a big kettle and eat them," said Round Paw in warm approval.

The fellow with the whip was about twenty years old and his facial expression was peculiar. His light-blue eyes blazed with anger while his snub nose and wide mouth gave the lie to any suggestion of ferocity.

"What have the men done?" I inquired, pausing and leaning on my rifle.

"Ding them most mortally! But they've done enough," he cried, with a side glance of curiosity at the Indian. "And I don't have to tell every wild man of the woods what I'm doing, or why I'm doing it."

"That's true," I agreed. "But we can see what you're doing. My friend here says they are Frenchmen and that he believes you will boil and eat them."

The poor devils set up a most dolorous howling. The red-head scowled with his eyes and laughed with his big mouth. He hardly knew whether to approve of us, or take offense. But the terror of his prisoners decided him, and with a loud guffaw he cried:

"That would be a fetching joke on the two of them! B'iled in a kettle! Lord's law! But they would look comical jammed in a kettle!"

Now that his temper was softened he explained further:

"These infernal scoundrels stole two bells from Ben the Great Cove drover at the mill last night. I'm working for him. The fools could 'a' got away if they'd know'd enough to hide the bells somewhere while they kept hid. But they took the bells along with them and I follered the noise and caught them early this morning. Now they're taking the bells back. Whoa, hish! Stand still there, you ——, or I'll tan your jacket nineteen to the dozen!" And to bind his promise he cracked the whip and elicited a rare yell.

"In God's great mercy, sir, help us!" bleated the prisoner on the off-side. "He was about to follow the Carlisle road, bound for Philadelphia. He'd have no need for bells after he'd reached Shippensburg or Carlisle. We did but borrow them. He would have found them waiting for him when he came back."

"Not need my bells, you —— rascals! What would Philadelphia folks think of me driving horses along their road without bells? How would I find them if they strayed while I was there?" And he punctuated each query with a clever slash apiece.

"If they stole your bells you serve them right. Thieves should be well whipped, so their welts will burn when tempted to steal again. We'll keep you company to the mill."

He now took time to explain how he had hired out two days before to go with the drover, who was driving some cattle through the eastern settlements.

"I'm Balsar Cromit," he added. "I live at the mill, or two miles below it, with Richard and John Craig. Made it look bad when these rascals stole the bells right after I took service with Ben. It hurt my feelings most dingly."

Our presence proved to be a favor to the rogues, for Cromit became so interested in asking questions that he forgot to swing the whip. By degrees I learned that our new acquaintance had never been in any settlement above the log-cabin plane, that he believed the houses in Philadelphia were made of logs and that the horses wore bells as they did in the wilderness. He had never seen a plastered house although he had heard the Craig brothers tell about them. He had never seen the ocean or a big ship, and was hungry to get my description of both.

Long before his age I had learned the little gallantries of deportment expected of all youths of good families; but he had never seen, perhaps had never heard of, such things as finger-rings, ruffles, beauty-patches, and the ordinary ornaments of dress. Yet when I took my turn at asking questions concerning his environment he was shrewd enough. He knew the forests as did the wild animals. Strength and endurance were the first requisites along the frontier and of more worth than any intimacy with the airs and graces affected by beaux and belles in the eastern towns.

That Cromit had great confidence in his physical powers was shown by his eager offer to wager three months' pay against my powder-horn that he could outshoot me, outrun me or pin me to the ground in wrestling. Observing his sharp glances at the Onondaga I asked him if he had ever seen any wild Indians.

"Why, most sartin." And he appeared both surprized and amused at the query. "I was a fort soldier when I was twelve. Since then I've had more'n one severe wring with the varmints."

"You should be with Braddock's army. Three pounds if you enlist. A fine red coat and a fine new musket."

"A rifle's worth more'n all the muskets ever made," he said.

"A rifle then. The army needs men who know the woods. Or you could drive a wagon."

"After I've seen all the lies they've told me about Philadelphia mebbe I'll go and help old Braddock lick the French. Do you think I'd git a pretty chunk of land if I went with the army to Du Quesne?"

"Alexandria and other Virginia men believe there'll be land for the taking. Surely there'll be enough to go around."

He scratched his head and reflected; then decided:

"If old Braddock can wait till I git back from Philadelphia mebbe I'll help him. But if he's one of them sass-and-pepper men, him and me won't pull together at all."

While we were talking one of the prisoners succeeded in working his bonds loose. The Onondaga, however, had been watching him, and when he made a dash for the woods Round Paw sounded his war-whoop and was after him. My friend took care to prolong the chase until the frightened scamp was close to cover.

"He runs like he was hobbled!" groaned Cromit, who had left it for Round Paw to recapture the man.

As he spoke Round Paw left the ground in a flying leap and landed on the shoulders of the thief and crushed him to the ground. With his shrill scalp-halloa the Indian seized the fellow's topknot and described a glittering circle with his knife. I could not tell which screamed the more lustily, the man on the ground or his terrified mate. Cromit's blue eyes bulged with concern, but my smile reassured him. It was only Round Paw's sense of humor finding expression. He yanked the man to his feet and drove him back to us, ki-yi-ing like a frightened puppy.

MCDOWELL'S settlement consisted of the mill and half-a-dozen cabins scattered along the horse-path that struck into the Shippensburg, Carlisle and Harris' Ferry Road a short distance beyond the Craig place. Cromit halted his prisoners near the Widow Cox's house, close by the mill.

Three horses and a dozen beeves were waiting to take the road. A man with a beard that reached to his waist was lounging under a tree. On our approach he rose to his feet and stretched his long arms and lounged toward us, saying:

"So you've fotched 'em back, Balsar. You're going to be a likely helper."

"I went a-purpose to fotch 'em back," grinned Cromit as he untied the prisoners' hands and ordered them to replace the stolen bells.

The thieves did their work with all the alacrity their benumbed fingers would permit; and while they frantically bestirred themselves the drover leisurely peeled off his "warmus," or sleeveless undercoat, and remarked:

"Too bad McDowell and his men ain't here to see the fun, but word was brought right after you left last night, Balsar, that there is to be some rare witch-hunting in Great Cove and every one's gone over the mountains to see how the job's done."

Stretching his arms to limber up his powerful muscles he examined two long whips and tested them. Cromit grinned at me and nodded toward his employer. To the badly-frightened rogues he softly advised—

"Let's see how fast you can make your heels fly."

They were off the moment he finished, racing madly over their back-track. The drover heard the scuffling of their fleeing feet and turned about just as the two turned one side and dived into a bush growth. Bawling wrathfully for them to halt he started on a lumbering run but soon gave it up and came back to where we stood. Cromit was unable to conceal his glee.

"Why did you let them sarpents run loose, Balsar?" demanded the drover.

As he put the question he stood with his feet apart and drew the long lash through his fingers.

"Sarpents don't run, Ben," chuckled Cromit.

"Why did you let them go?"

"Lor, Ben! They've been licked and walloped almost every step of a good ten mile."

"And who be you, you worthless lout, to say when thieves have had their comeuppance?" bellowed the drover, now letting his rage run wild. "Stand clear of them two men."

"Now, Ben, don't you do it," advised Cromit, his reddish brows working up and down. "I'm telling you, don't you do it. I ain't no nigger, or thief. I sha'n't take it kindly, Ben. I'll hate it most mortally."

"Stand clear of them strangers and take your needings," roared the drover.

"Ben, you stop and think on it," pleaded Cromit, yet stepping away from us. "For I tell you that we shall have a bad wring if you pester me."

With an animal howl the drover drew back his long arm and lashed at the tall, awkward figure. With the scream of a panther making a night-kill Cromit's long body shot through the air, his blue eyes burning with murder, his wide mouth opened to its fullest extent. As he crashed against the drover he half-laughed, half-sobbed—

"I told you not to do it, Ben."

They went down in the dirt, a most bewildering swirl of legs and arms, but they had kicked up the dust for only part of a minute before Cromit was erect again, grinning and spitting blood. The drover remained on his back and looked as if Braddock's army, heavy guns and all, had marched over him. His face was covered with blood and there were bloody fingerprints on his dark throat.

Believing the man was dead I kneeled to examine him. Cromit kept up his chattering laugh as he watched me. Round Paw glided forward and stared at the damaged visage and wounded throat and gave a loud "Yo-hah!" his way of expressing amazement or approval. With a fiendish finger-strength Cromit had all but torn the man's throat open.

"He will make a big warrior," gravely said Round Paw as he resumed his stolid bearing and stepped back to show the spectacle had no further interest for him.

"I don't know whether you've killed him or not," I told Cromit, who was still indulging in his mirthless laughter. "He can't be left here in the path. Catch hold of his heels. We'll move him under the tree and throw water on him."

"I'd have had his gullet open like the split craw of a fowl in another jiffy," whined Cromit as he did as told. "But he'll be owing me for two days and one night of work and I want my pay. I asked him not to do it, but he was ever a masterful man."

The Widow Cox appeared from somewhere, and with the border-woman's quickness of perception she wasted no time in asking questions, but brought a noggin of rum which we poured down the injured throat. Then followed a bucket of water over the shaggy head. With a groan the drover regained his senses. He glared feebly at Cromit, who shook his head and said:

"It'll be a l'arning to you, Ben. I told you not to do it."

"You ——" gasped the drover.

"Then all the more reason why I should be quittance with you. I'm off to march with Braddock's army. I've worked two days and a night for you—a whole night gitting the bells back—three days' work. You pay me and drive your own cattle."

"A trade's a trade," groaned the drover. "To Philadelphia and back was the 'greement. When that's done we'll talk quittance and wages."

"Have I got to pay you another visit?" asked Cromit.

And he renewed his chuckling and opened and closed his fingers, and bent his knees as if about to spring upon the prostrate man.

"Keep off, you ——!" squealed the drover. "I'll pay."

Moaning and sighing, and taking on like one badly broken he crawled to his feet, fished a bag of coins from the bosom of his shirt and counted out a small sum into Cromit's palm. Cromit turned to me and said—

"Now I'm ready to show old Braddock's army how to fight."

The Widow Cox spoke up and shrilly upbraided him:

"Shame on you, you lumbering dolt! You've hurt a most proper man."

"He'll be properer now, Mother Cox."

"Why didn't these two strangers stop your bloody work? At least the white man, if he be white. If George Croghan had been here he'd 'a' stopped you quick enough."

"Mebbe so, mebbe not, Mother Cox. But Croghan's in Great Cove. So it's no good talking his name, Mother Cox," bantered Cromit.

"How do you know he's in Great Cove?" I demanded.

The widow eyed me with stern disapproval, but was quick to take the words from Cromit's mouth, and told me:

"He was here three days ago and bound for there. Some of his dratted Injuns are straying 'round the country, and he's looking 'em up. And when he ain't hunting up his Injuns he's trying to hire our men to work on Braddock's road. Let the red-coats make their own road, I say."

"But the army can't march without a road, and they can't lick the French if they have to spend time making the road," I reminded her.

"You must be a daft body," she scoffed. "As if our men-folks would leave their planting now the army's 'tween us and the French! Let the lazy, good-for-nothing sojers make their own road. God save the king, says I with all my heart, but it's too much to ask our men to leave their crops to make roads for sojers to walk over. When our men-folks go to the Ohio they don't have no road laid down for 'em to walk on. They just git up and git."

The widow's inability to understand the need of a road when an army took to the wilderness was a fair sample of many a settler's attitude. Border-men went and came and accepted nature's obstacles as something to be made the best of. Each and all in the colony demanded protection from the French and their red allies, but there were many who did not relish leaving their little clearings long enough to help establish that protection. With Braddock's army and provincial volunteers committed to the task, why bother the husbandman?

"Where is McDowell and his men? Where are the Craigs?" I asked.

"McDowell's folks is in Great Cove, I told you," huskily reminded the drover.

"And the Craig brothers are on the road to Shippensburg," said the widow. "McDowell's gone to help drive out some witches."

"But he and his men haven't time to help drive out the French," I said.

She eyed me blankly, and then berated me:

"Of all the numskulls! There ain't no French nearer'n Fort Du Quesne. They can't hurt us with Braddock's army going ag'in 'em. But witches right among us can 'spell' our cattle and send sore pains to our children. Merciful land! What good to drive the French from the Allegheny if witches can work their evil spells in our homes?"

"If it wan't for these beeves I'd go back and help clean out the devil's nest," muttered the drover.

"There'll be no tormenting of poor people on the charge of witchcraft if George Croghan is in the Cove," I told them. To Cromit:

"We're bound for Will's Creek, but we must find Croghan. The Onondaga and I will swing around on the Rea's Town Road and visit Great Cove. Will you go with us?"

He twisted uneasily and there was a look in his eyes I had not seen before.

"I ain't no call to mix up in witch-hunting," he mumbled.

"Then take the southern trail and make Will's Creek alone."

"I ain't no call to be told what trail I'll take or sha'n't take."

"Then go to the ——" For the fellow exasperated me.

I walked up the horse-path toward Parnal's Knob with Round Paw at my heels. We covered a quarter of a mile when a yell behind caused us to look back. Cromit was coming on the run and his long legs carried him rapidly. I expected trouble and handed my rifle to Round Paw. Cromit halted and informed me:

"I ain't no call to sell my soul to the devil. I don't hanker to see no witches, but I'll go with you. Just stopped to git my knife. Old Braddock will give me a new gun, but he might be stingy with his knives." And he patted a large butcher knife worn without a sheath. Did he trip and fall it would be a miracle if he escaped inflicting a severe injury on himself.

THE belief in witches and wizards in western Pennsylvania and Virginia was widespread. The Old World immigrants had brought along their superstitions as well as their Bibles. Once they had ventured into the unbroken forests and made a clearing and felt the solitude closing about them like a wall they worked new fancies into the old tales. If there were werwolves in Europe why should there not be as bad, or worse, diabolic agencies in this new land of gloomy, ancient forests, weird water-falls and wild mountains?

The first settlers heard a new voice in the Winter wind howling down the chimney of some lonely cabin, a voice they quickly translated into eldritch screams and shrieking threats. The ominous rumble of thunder high up some mountain slope was the spirit of the place calling for victims. Certain sections of the country were given a fearsome repute, and the dangers of such localities, as retold before the flickering fireplace and to the crooning accompaniment of the wind, ceased to be myths and became facts.

But when the devil chose to work through human agency a witch was the result. The discovery of a witch furnished the frightened something to fight against. Another phenomenon was the unconscious egotism of my sex—for while witches were fell creatures, with their souls sold to the devil, a wizard—always a man—invariably was a beneficent agency, and used his power to undo the mischief worked by witches. These imposters, too lazy to work so long as they could gain a living by imposing on the credulity of the simple-minded, helped to keep the wicked notions alive.

What with the Palatine Germans and their gruesome beliefs, the Irish with their fairies, the Scotch with their gnomes and other strange hill creatures, and the English with their devotion to ghosts, it was small wonder that almost any community along the frontiers should possess those who implicitly believed in witchcraft. Nor was this delusion lacking in New England and other colonies.

My companions had little to say as we traversed the western end of Path Valley and gained an opening through the hills that led down into the Cove at a point just south of the Rea's Town road. The Onondaga knew enough English to understand some of our talk at the mill and had questioned me during the journey until I told him what we might witness in the Cove. His red mind was filled with beliefs in the Stonish Giants and other awesome monsters, and more than once his pace slackened. Nor did Cromit have much liking for our errand, but pride was holding him up. Both looked very sober as we drew clear of the hills and beheld two-score men and women grouped at the foot of a low hill on which stood a log-cabin.

The door of the cabin was open but I saw none of the occupants. Nor were the people at the foot of the hill giving much heed to the cabin as we came up. Their interest was confined to a woman groveling on the grass and making a great outcry.

Round Paw halted some rods from the gathering and drew his blanket about him. He had no desire to become better acquainted with the white man's sorcery. I heard him mutter:

"A white woman is *honnatkon* (possessing the power of monstrous beings). The Man of the Wolf is *arendiouanen* (having a powerful orenda). My *oyaron* is very magic."

And he fumbled at the little mystery bag hanging from his neck which held some small object that symbolized for him his *oyaron*, or guardian genius.

Cromit also halted, his mouth agape. I believe he would have bolted if not for the presence of the red man. Leaving the two I pushed my way through the crowd and looked down on the young woman. She was having a fit of some kind. As she writhed and squirmed she shrieked:

"Elsie Dinwold's eyes! Elsie Dinwold's eyes! Eyes in the bottom of the barrel! Her eyes! She's 'spelling' me!" And then a prolonged scream.

"Some one send for Hokes. He'll unwitch her," howled a woman, whose streaming gray hair might easily have won her the name of witch in some other community.

"One of the Jessups has gone for Hokes. But he must go to the end of the valley to fetch him," spoke up a man.

"What's the matter here?" I asked.

"This young woman is witched, sir," cried the gray-haired woman.

"Witched by Elsie Dinwold," growled a man; and he turned to shake his clinched hand at the cabin on the hill. "But she'll witch us no more! We'll burn that nest. Fight the devil with fire! Der Hexenkopf has bred witches long enough. We've sent for John Hokes, sir. He's a rare wizard. He'll soon take the spell off this poor sufferer."

"Is George Croghan in the valley?"

"Gone yesterday for Will's Creek."

The sufferer did not fancy any shifting of attention and renewed her screaming and kicking.

"We must try to help her while waiting for the wizard," I said.

"John Hokes is a rare witch-master. Better wait," advised some one.

"The devil hates water. Bring me a bucketful," I commanded.

I rolled up the wide sleeves of my hunting-shirt as if intending to bathe my hands before attempting even a partial cure. Some were opposed to any interference on my part, contending that the witch-master would not approve. The majority were curious to observe my methods, and at last a bucket of water was placed before me. I picked it up and dashed it over the woman. Spitting like a cat she came to a sitting posture. When she could get her breath she began calling curses down on my head.

"The devil hates cold water," I repeated. "The woman is all right now if she will keep out of the moonlight for three nights."

"Then you are a wizard and can remove spells?" eagerly asked the gray-haired woman. Others were staring at me with much respect.

"Some spells," I admitted. "Now tell me how this woman was 'spelled'."

A DOZEN voices began to furnish the information. I thrust my fingers into my ears. At last the confusion ceased and one man was permitted to act as spokesman.

It seemed that Elsie Dinwold, who lived with her uncle in the cabin on Der Hexenkopf, or The Witches' Head, as the little hill was called, had laid a most malevolent trap for the woman now hobbling to her cabin for a dry shift. The trap was as simple as it was malignant, and thereby spoke highly for the devil's ingenuity. It consisted of a barrel and a witch snake.

The narrator was here interrupted by several, who insisted Elsie Dinwold had changed herself into a snake, or had entered the body of the snake—preferably the latter as the snake was still in the barrel and the accused was in her cabin. The victim had been induced by some magic arts to pause and look into the barrel. She beheld a large rattlesnake with Elsie Dinwold's eyes.

The barrel was pointed out to me. I walked to it and looked inside. My flesh crawled as I encountered the relentless malignity of the serpent's staring eyes. The odor from the reptile was most offensive. I could even imagine that my head was growing dizzy and that I had an impulse to lower my face closer to the snake. I began to feel a nausea. I could not blame the poor woman for being overcome. And, for all I know, the baleful gaze of the snake had for the moment befuddled her wits.

I directed the men to kill the snake and would have remained to make sure it was done had not the appearance of a slim figure in the cabin-door set the crowd into a wild uproar. The woman stepped outside and was followed by a man badly crippled, for he walked with difficulty even while using two canes. Some in the gathering began gesticulating, and then they were sweeping up the hill, a frantic mob. All came to an abrupt halt, however, some distance from the man and woman. I mounted the slope and passed a fat German, who puffed and snorted and raved wildly, probably telling me how he had burned a live puppy in his fireplace to fend off a witch-spell.

A red-faced man in the first line of settlers shook his fist at the young woman and howled—

"You shall confess your hellish power."

"Why all this fuss over a snake in a barrel?" I asked, fearing some harm would be inflicted on the woman and the cripple.

"She is a woman of Der Hexenkopf!" accused a woman, pointing a trembling finger.

"She comes of a foul brood," excitedly explained a man.

Several Germans caught their name for The Witches' Head and began repeating it in a guttural sing-song, interspersed with mystic words and charms.

"You are a stranger here, sir, and don't know what mischief this witch-family has worked in our valley," another told me.

I took time to look more closely. The

woman, scarcely more than a girl, had suddenly taken alarm for the man's safety, and had interposed her slim figure between him and her accusers. Her loosened hair was blowing about her face and half-veiling her thin features. She leaned forward as she watched us, her body lithe and wiry as a boy's, her lips parted in a little feline snarl. Her feet and legs were bare and much scratched by briers. Her coarse garment of linsey was torn at the neck, suggesting that some of her tormentors had dared to lay hands upon her.

Knowing me to be a stranger and yearning for an impartial judge she centered her wild gaze on me and panted:

"I'm no witch. These folks be fools! Two of the Jessup boys caught a snake with a forked stick last night and threw it into the barrel to keep alive and tease. Now they say I did it."

"Yah-h-h!" howled the settlers. One young man I took to be a Jessup shouted that she lied about the snake.

She gave them no heed, but pawing the brown hair back from her face continued addressing me, and protesting:

"I am no witch. I live here alone with my uncle. He is old, a cripple with rheumty pains. Several years ago the beastly Germans named this place Der Hexenkopf. My poor mother died from fear and sorrow. My two sisters, older'n me, were driven out of the valley. I am the last of the women to live on The Witches' Head, and they won't let me live in peace."

"Keep your wicked jaws closed tight, or we'll pin 'em together," roared the red-faced man.

He started toward her, but she spat like a cat, and in grotesque haste he fell back.

"The devil 's in her, Brother Martin! Look out!" some one warned.

I waved my hands for silence and requested—

"Will some of you good folks tell me what she has done besides putting the snake in the barrel?"

It was the old man, her uncle, who enlightened me.

"They say she sent a sickness to Oscar Kluck's white horse," he tremulously explained. "Oscar Kluck came here this morning early and asked me to pay four pounds for the hurt done the animal. I had no money."

"He was a good hoss, my white one. I refused four pounds for him," cried Kluck. "Now she's spoiled him—the —— spawn!"

The gray-haired woman tugged my fringed sleeve and eagerly informed me:

"Clouds of witches gather on this hill at night and play their mad games and do their devilish work. I saw them one night. The next day my little grandson had a leg-trouble along of their witching him."

"She shall confess, or be whipped until she does," bawled Brother Martin.

Some one tugged my other elbow. It was Cromit. His face was weak from fear, and his voice trembled as he whispered:

"I've been looking at the white horse. I know horses. He's old and oughter be shot. He was never worth four pounds. Four shillings would be nearer." He scuttled back to the Onondaga. The cripple was speaking.

"If she confesses and promises never to do it again shall she be left unharmed?"

"Let her say she is a witch and then leave the valley this day, never to come back, and she sha'n't be whipped," promised Brother Martin.

"She sha'n't stir till she 's paid four pounds for the hurt done my white horse," cried Kluck.

Cromit heard him and again approached and snarled in Kluck's face:

"Your horse is old. He's not worth ninepence." Kluck gave ground, muttering under his breath.

"She shall go unhurt if she confesses," repeated Brother Martin.

"But I can't go," wailed the girl. "Who would take care of my uncle? The dear God knows I would gladly go and never look toward this place again if my uncle could go with me!"

"Blasphemer!"

"Never mind me, little Elsie. You must not be whipped," groaned her uncle.

"Whipped? Let one of them lay a finger on me again—" she fiercely began.

"Teach the —— brat we can break her spells!" screamed a woman.

"The white horse ain't worth a shilling and ain't been worth one for years," cried Cromit, his boldness greatly surprizing me. "The man that owns the horse is trying to cheat these folks out of four pound."

"Oh-h! Now she's witched the young man! Now she's put a spell on him! Now he wears the devil's mark and doesn't know it, poor soul!" grieved Brother Martin.

"There may be witches," uneasily admitted Cromit and avoiding the young woman's steady gaze. "We all know there be witches. But they're always old women ——"

"No! No! No!" cried half a dozen voices, including the woman with the disheveled gray hair. They were not angry with him, but pitied him for being under her spell.

"There was Jennie Dance in Little Cove, only sixteen years old. There was Alice Snow, only twenty—" and various other names of witches who were young in years.

"She threatens us with the devil's power! She should be burned and her ashes scattered at midnight," loudly declared a man in English but speaking with a thick accent.

Cromit rolled his eyes and began laughing. I interposed:

"Enough. There will be no burning, nor whipping. She is scarcely more than a girl. You people talk like crazy folks."

"By ——! She shall say she's a witch!" shouted a stout fellow.

"And who be you, mister, to come to Der Hexenkopf and say what we'll do and what we won't?" fiercely demanded a woman of me.

"I am recruiting for Braddock's army. Three pounds sterling to every man who enlists. A fine red coat and a fine new musket. This man beside me is Balsar Cromit from McDowell's mill. He has enlisted. If McDowell, or any of his men are here they'll vouch for him."

"Big fool he!"

"You know McDowell and his men turned back yesterday, or you wouldn't call on them for a character."

"My red friend back there is an Onondaga Indian. He will bring an ax in his hand if I call. I have this rifle, which makes a good club. The young woman shall not be whipped."

"Horoor! No whipping!" yelled Cromit, and he stretched forth his half-closed hands and began turning on his heel in search of any who might care to argue the point more intimately.

"Then we'll whip her uncle till she tells the truth. And if you two want a wring with us, mister, then you two can have a harder one than ever the French will give Braddock's army," challenged a man with the brawny arms of a smith.

CROMIT was on him, and before I could interfere had the fellow down with his tongue protruding between his teeth. It required all my strength to loosen the fellow's hands from the massive throat; and there was a fine uproar. One man tried to hit Cromit with a club but my rifle-barrel prevented the blow.

I had no intention of getting into a rough-and-tumble fight with the settlers, so I threw up the rifle and held them back. While they were huddled together the Onondaga let out a war-whoop and came charging up the hill, bounding high and swinging his ax. The women screamed and fell back; the men forgot me to cover the retreat of the women. I yelled for the Indian to halt and for the settlers to listen. When I had secured their attention I said:

"Drop back a bit and let me talk with the woman alone. This is no place for either her or her uncle. Perhaps it can be arranged for both to leave this valley."

With much grumbling and many loud threats they accepted the truce and retired some distance down the hill. Cromit and the Onondaga had no wish to draw closer to the cabin, so I went to the forlorn couple alone. The man was seated on a log, leaning forward by resting on his canes, and breathing heavily. His eyes were bulging in a fashion I did not like. The girl glared at me, unable to believe I could be a friend, yet puzzled at my defiance of her neighbors.

"You have nothing to fear from me, child," I told her.

"Child!" she bitterly repeated. "I'm an old woman. I stopped being a child when very small. My mother was pretty. Till they called her a witch her hair was as brown as mine. My father went over the mountains, where no one had been, and never came back. That was when I was a baby. My uncle lived here with us and supplied us with meat. Then they called my mother a witch, and she died. We believed my father would come back some time. We were happy till those brutes began their whispering. If a cow died some Dutchman (all Germans in the colony were called Dutchmen) said my mother had shot the creature with a hair-ball. If a man didn't want to work he said my mother or my two older sisters had changed him into a horse and had ridden him all night over the hills and well-nigh killed him.

"There are two or three men in this valley and as many more in Little Cove who will not work. They pretend to be witch-masters, and they get their keep by pretending to undo the mischief the Dinwold women were said to do. After my mother's death, and after they named this place 'Der Hexenkopf' my sisters would not live here. They knew men were drawing our pictures on stumps and shooting them with silver bullets; and they went away, and only I was left. Those fools down there burn marks on their dogs and cattle to cure them of my spells. Every time a worthless scamp strips an udder they say I milked their cows."

She broke off and began to laugh as if bereft. Before I could remonstrate she suddenly ceased and resumed:

"Do you know how we witches are said to milk cows? We hang up a strip of new cloth and stick a thorn in it, a thorn-pin for every cow we wish to milk by witchcraft. Then we make our spells and draw the milk from the fringed edge of the cloth. And, mister, did you ever notice that a witch never has men-folks to fight for her? It is so. My uncle doesn't count. He is helpless. I, not he, must now make the Fall hunt if we have meat through the Winter. So you see four women could not live on a hill 'less they be witches."

Abandoning this mood she brokenly cried—

"God help those who must live among fools!"

I had let her talk herself out, and now said:

"This valley isn't safe for you. Isn't there any place where you can go? Back to Carlisle, Philadelphia, or to some Maryland town?"

"It isn't easy to travel with a helpless man," she fiercely reminded me. "I'm not 'fraid of them. They may kill me. I don't care. Anyway, I wouldn't care if it wasn't for my uncle."

I glanced at the cripple. He did not seem to be hearing our talk, but his face was flushed and his breathing more rapid.

"You had better go inside and lie down," I told him.

"You belong to Braddock's army?" he murmured.

"A scout for the army."

"God save the King! Give the French a good lacing. The army? Where is it?"

"It gathers at Will's Creek. It will march as fast as the road is built."

"Would I were younger and sound of limb! I'd take my three cows there and sell them and march with the army."

"Get your uncle inside," I whispered to the girl. "He's unwell. The excitement has upset him."

She put her arms around him and petted him, and murmured things I could not hear, and aided him to enter the cabin. The people down the hill noted her disappearance and began advancing up the slope. Calling to the Onondaga in English I directed—

"Scalp the German and the red-faced man if they do not fall back."

In his own tongue I added—

"Scare those fools away."

Round Paw threw aside his blanket and glided toward the oncoming settlers. Cromit flourished his big knife and kept at the Indian's side. The latter sounded his war-whoop and charged. The assemblage began to break up and were soon scuttling down the hill. The girl had heard the clamor and was now rushing from the door with a flint-lock musket in her small brown hands.

"Here's witchcraft you'll understand!" she screamed and would have aimed and discharged the piece had I not discouraged her.

Cromit, now returning, observed the incident, and yelled—

"Don't shoot, missy."

He halted twenty feet from the door.

"So you're afraid like the others, who say I am a witch," she contemptuously called out to him.

"A witch, huh?" And he shifted his big feet about in a silly fashion and hung his head. "By the same token all young women be witches. You have monstrous pretty hair, lass."

This bit of rustic homage did more than all my talk to make her womanly. It was a long time since the poor thing had heard pleasing speech. Her thin face grew pink and for the moment her eyes were gentle. For a few moments Cromit was amazed at his own boldness. Then with a duck of his bristling red head he raced down the hill releasing his sudden exuberance of spirits in a series of wild yells. The Onondaga caught the mood and began whooping. The unarmed settlers gave way in a panic and raced back to their cabins.

"Elsie Dinwold, you must get away from this valley. Once we're gone there'll be no one to protect you. Your uncle must risk it. He will surely die if he stays here."

"I'll get a horse and get him out of the *Cove if it* kills him. I never saw him like this before. We have three cows and two *oxen.* No one here will pay what they are worth. Will Braddock's army buy them?"

"Gladly.. Fresh beef will be needed at Will's Creek. But you can't drive them there, and my business won't let me do it. There must be some one in the Cove who will buy them at a fair price. I'll send the man Cromit up here to get them and find a buyer. He's as shrewd as he is red-headed. He'll drive a good bargain for you. Now let me see your uncle."

Dinwold was on his bed, breathing rapidly and hiccuping at intervals. My experience with death had been largely confined to men dying from mortal wounds, but I knew that this man was about to enter a longer and deeper valley than that of Great Cove. His heart was racing like a runaway horse, and he did not sense our presence at his side. I patted the girl's bowed head and promised she should not be disturbed.

She knew the truth, for she followed me to the door and whispered—

"He must die."

"I fear he is dying now," I told her. "I will stay with you."

"No!" There was a flash of fierceness in her refusal. More gently she added:

"We've been without kindness a long time. We'll bide the rest of the way together and alone. Please go now."

I descended the hill to where Cromit and the Indian were awaiting the settlers' return. Men were hurrying up with axes and muskets, eager to sooth the sting their pride had received. I told my companions to keep back while I spoke to the settlers. The absence of women spoke convincingly of their determination. I dropped my rifle and went to them and announced that Dinwold was dying and that the young woman would leave the valley very soon, and that her departure would be hastened could she find some one to buy her cattle.

My words sobered them and took the edge from their anger. Brother Martin said—

"If she will swear on the Holy Book that they are not bewitched I'll take them off her hands."

"We three men will drive them to Braddock's camp, or will sell them here. We can get more for them on Will's Creek. The man Cromit of McDowell's mill will make the trade if you care to buy."

"Bewitched, or bedeviled, I care not. I'll buy them and cure them and then sell them to Braddock. Let the young man stop showing his claws and his teeth and we can make a trade."

Much pleased at the outcome of what had threatened to be a serious affair I returned to Cromit and gave him his instructions. I told him the Indian and I would spread our blankets in the path south of the hill and for him to take the money to the cabin, if he made a fair bargain, and then come to us. Reluctant to go near the cabin alone he set off slowly up the hill. The settlers, too, began to disperse, for it was verging on dusk and they had no more liking for the hill than did Cromit and the Onondaga.

"I am *arendiouanen,*" muttered Round Paw. "My *oyaron* has much magic. Let us go where the ground is smoother."

He was a very brave man. I do not know that I ever met a braver. But at night, when the Flying Heads were streaming through the sky, when the skeletons of dead men disported and swam in the moon-lit waters of his northern lakes, when *Uskunrharhis*, the carnivorous ghost, wearing the bones of the dead, quested the black woods for fresh victims, my friend felt his soul shake. Now a white witch of a family of witches plied her magic arts, and to feed his courage he began chanting:

> "*Ha-hum-weh. Ha-hum-weh*— I belong to the Wolf Clan. I belong to the Wolf Clan."

In less than an hour Cromit came through the darkness to us and announced:

"She's got the money and says I made a good bargain. But the man, her uncle, will never see the stars again in this mortal land. There's the death-mark on him."

WE SLEPT for several hours and it must have been close to midnight when the report of a flintlock brought us to our feet.

Believing the girl was in trouble I called on my companions to follow me. Cromit ran at my side. Behind us came the Onondaga, softly humming:

"*Ha-hum-weh. Ha-hum-weh.*"

He chanted it over and over as we

mounted the hill and only became silent when the girl confronted us, a vague, slim figure in the night. In a faint voice she said:

"He is dead. My good uncle is dead. He died in his sleep. His kind heart was very weak."

She did not weep but kept repeating that he had died in his sleep. The Onondaga would not enter the cabin, but Cromit and I wrapped Dinwold in a blanket and dug a grave some distance from the cabin, the girl holding a pine-torch so that we might see. When we had finished and had retired she threw herself on the grave and wept a little. Then she came to us and said:

"I leave this place this night. Those people down there killed him. I leave this place this night."

"Then you must go to McDowell's mill, and from there start for the eastern settlements. We will go with you as far as the mill. Later we will plan just how and where you are to travel. I can give you a letter to Charles Swaine at Shippensburg, and I know he will be pleased to serve you."

"Wait till I get a bundle from the cabin and I will go with you mister. God knows there are those at McDowell's mill who will not be glad to see any one from Der Hexenkopf. Yet I will go there because you have been good to me. Wait for me at the foot of the hill."

She was so long in the cabin that I had started back to find her when I met her running down the slope. In the faint starlight I saw she had a blanket muffled over her slim figure. She was impatient to get away from the hill and insisted on making a night journey to the mill. We could not let her travel alone, and the Onondaga ran on ahead to secure our blankets. By the time he joined us we could hear a voice crying down the valley. Soon it was answered. Other voices joined in, and I was wondering if the settlers had broken faith and were planning mischief when Cromit called my attention to a glow in the sky in the direction of The Witches' Head. We stepped clear of the trees to see what it meant.

"They're burning the cabin! Ding the dirty cowards!" yelped Cromit.

"They have not had time to reach the hill," corrected the Onondaga in his own tongue. "The white woman was in there alone. She started the fire."

I turned back among the trees to question her, but she had vanished. In vain did we beat about the woods and call her name. The settlers were now abroad but keeping at respectable distance from the hill and the blazing cabin. We traveled all that night and camped and traveled again, but the girl had not appeared at the mill.

"She is a witch. She is ***honnatkon***. She rides through the air," muttered Round Paw as we took the southern path.

A shrill cry caused us to halt. The Widow Cox was coming after us, waving something in her hand.

"God's gracious mercy on us all!" she panted as she came up to us. "I counted five shooting-stars last night and saw the outline of an ax on a cloud at sunrise. Bad things be brewing! Then I found this after you'd called. It had been left at my door and the wind must 'a' blown it one side."

It was a small piece of dressed deerskin. On one side with a charred stick was written—

For bradoks scout if he asks For Elsie Dinwold.

Amazed I turned it over and read:

I told You I wud Go to makdowls mill I didnt say Youd see me Thar. E. D.

CHAPTER III

ON BRADDOCK'S BUSINESS

ELSIE DINWOLD had been to McDowell's mill ahead of us and no one had seen her. After reading her message, which she had planned to leave at the Cox cabin even before her flight from The Witches' Head, we retraced our steps and made further inquiry. The result was the same. Cromit returned from the Craig brothers convinced the girl had not passed that cabin in making for the Shippensburg road. He was not at ease while he made his report and I knew he was remembering the family history behind the girl—that she came from a family of witches.

The Onondaga was outspoken and frankly declared his belief in her magic powers to fly through the air. He was very agreeable to immediate travel away from the mill. I did not try to argue against his superstitious notions, although it was plain to any one, not ghost-ridden, that she had kept to the woods until beyond the mill settlement and was now wandering along the Shippensburg-Carlisle road without having paused to secure my letter of introduction to Mr. Swaine.

We commenced our journey to Will's Creek, with the Onondaga leading the way and his watchful, suspicious gaze swinging from side to side of the narrow path as alertly as if we had been in the Huron country. Cromit was silent much of the time, but from his occasional remarks I knew he was thinking of the Dinwold woman. When we halted to eat a few mouthfuls he told me—

"I dreamed of the brown-haired one last night."

"Meaning Elsie Dinwold?"

He nodded, his face lengthening.

"T'other one who I sometimes dream of always fetches me good luck. This brown-hair will fetch bad luck, I take it."

"That's all nonsense. You dreamed of her because you saw her in danger and helped her. Who's the other one you dreamed of?"

"No one I ever saw. Just a dream woman. Got yaller hair. Always smiles. She fetches me good luck. But this other one—brown hair—bad luck, prob'ly."

"You'd never seen the Dinwold woman before?"

"Heard of her, of her fambly. Never seen her. When I've been in Great Cove I always kept to the lower end of the valley. They was always talking 'bout a fambly of witches living on a hill. I wa'n't fussed up any to see 'em. Still she's got master pretty hair."

"She'll bring you good luck," I comforted. "You did her a kindly service in trading her cattle for hard money."

He chuckled and told me—

"Feller who owned the white horse tried to git some of the money, but I made him look at my hands, and he said he'd stand his loss, seeing as how she was a woman."

We resumed our journey and after traveling a short distance the Onondaga halted and dropped on his knees. He had found eight bark spoons. Holding them up he said:

"So many Indians stopped here to eat this morning. They are our nephews, the Leni-lenape."

By all custom and courtesy he should have styled them his "grandfathers," because it was from their ancient home-land that many related tribes had migrated. All the Algonquian tribes paid them this respect as did the Hurons. The Shawnee and Mohican were proud to claim relationship with the Leni-lenape. But now that the Delawares had discarded the petticoats put upon them by the Long House, and insisted they were warriors and "real men," the Iroquois refused to acknowledge their political priority and whittled the respectful title down to that of nephews.

Round Paw added:

"They are some of the men Croghan has been hunting for. They have traveled east to see the Big Knives on the path. Now they go to Will's Creek to be there when the Big Chief comes with his warriors."

If his reasoning were correct the Delawares had journeyed east until they beheld Braddock's army on the march; and by the same token our campaign against the French would soon take us to Du Quesne. I was keen to press on.

Late that afternoon we reached the cabin of Simon Flax on Conollaway Creek. I had stopped overnight at the cabin on my Spring trip from Du Quesne and had found Flax to be something of a character. He had made a "deadening" by girdling an area of trees. When the foliage failed to grow in the second season the sun penetrated to the ground—for the first time since the first white man came to the country—and warmed the soil and made it ready for seed.

Among these dead forest-kings Flax had planted his corn and vegetables. The big patch of gaunt and naked trees presented a dreary spectacle to those who love life in nature; but to the pioneer the forlorn picture meant meal and green stuff—a most welcome relief from the monotonous meat diet. The labor of caring for the crops fell entirely to Mistress Flax. Once he had punched holes with a stick and had planted the seed Flax devoted his energy to turning bowls from tree-knots, the ash-wood being his choice.

It pleased him to surround his trade with mystery and to conceal his methods of making the bowls. His was a pretty knack, but if he practised secrecy long enough it would become a ritual and hamper him, then a fetish, and many a quaint superstition would spring up to surround his labors. If he wished to conceal the location of certain ash growths and made a practise of bringing the knots home at night the belief would develop among other makers of bowls that the knots could not be worked unless collected at night. On my former trip Flax had proudly informed me he had an excellent market for his wares in Great and Little Coves, and that drovers were willing to take along a load to sell in the eastern settlements.

The Onondaga had conceived the idea that the bowls resulted from magical arts and did not wish to visit the cabin a second time. As my purpose in visiting Flax was to secure him as a recruit for Braddock, I arranged for the Indian to make his camp half a mile from the cabin while Cromit and I pressed on. We reached the edge of the "deadening" and were about to leave the cover of the living timber when Cromit laid a hand on my shoulder and stared hungrily about.

I heard it, the gobbling of a turkey. With my rifle ready to knock over one of the big birds I was gently working under some low-hanging branches when the gobbling ceased and was succeeded by the bleating of a fawn.

"This country is chuck full of game even if some fools do say it's being driv west of the mountains," hoarsely whispered Cromit.

But when in rapid succession there came the howl of a wolf and the hooting of an owl I dropped the butt of my rifle and waited. Cromit growled:

"Some one's playing a trick on us and desarves to git 'quainted with a ounce ball. Or else them Injuns we almost overtook are sneaking round the Flax cabin."

Often the hoot of an owl would alarm a whole settlement and send every cabin-dweller pell-mell to the block-house, so likely were the savages to imitate the call of wild things, and so tautly were white nerves strung on the exposed frontiers. But no Indian attack on the Flax cabin was brewing, even if the bark spoons had been left by French Indians; for a red man would scarcely use the cry of an owl in the day-time.

We cautiously investigated and the mystery was explained by the shrill laughter of children. Noiselessly advancing to a circle of bushes we peered over into an open space and beheld two little boys and a girl. The three were intent on mimicking different birds and animals and were exceedingly clever at it.

The oldest of the trio, a boy of some ten years, had a hatchet, and now proceeded to instruct his young brother in throwing it at a tree. The youngster had mastered the knack of it more by instinct than by reason. It was amusing to hear him try to explain how the hatchet would strike edge first with the handle down at a distance of fifteen feet, and edge first with the handle up at twenty feet. But he could not make clear to the smaller child how the required number of revolutions at a certain distance depended upon the speed given the twirling weapon. Cromit spoiled their play by growling most realistically like a bear.

Even as they scampered away in fright however, the older boy proved his border breeding by stoutly bringing up the rear while urging the other two to run faster. Observing the bushes to be in motion where Cromit was about to reveal himself, he hurled the hatchet most dexterously, and only an intervening limb saved my companion from a split head. As it was the handle smote him smartly on the nose, bringing tears and oaths.

"Good Lor! But the young sarpent nearly brained me," he groaned.

"White talk!" gleefully cried the youngster.

The fugitives turned and raced back and were delighted to recognize in me a recent caller at the cabin. Their natural aloofness in the presence of strangers vanished; and in half a minute I had all three of them on my neck and shoulders, all whooping like mad.

* * *

IN THIS top-heavy fashion I led the way to the cabin. The bushes ahead swirled violently and a leather-faced woman with a heavy flintlock erupted, her hair disordered and her eyes furious. She was Mistress Flax, and always ready to face bear, painter, or Indians. It spoke highly of her husband's confidence in her that she, and not he, had come to the rescue. She halted, blinked her eyes a few times, cast quick glances at the grinning Cromit, and eagerly cried—

"Be the French licked yet, Mr. Brond?"

I made known my companion, and told her the army had not started on the real campaign yet.

"I was thinking it was prob'ly all over. We ain't seen no Injun signs for a dog's age."

"Eight passed within a few miles of here. They were making for Will's Creek where the army is gathering. We're trailing

George Croghan and getting recruits for the army."

"Ain't seen Croghan in a dog's age. Come up to the cabin an' squat an' have some meat (bear). A Little Cove man was here since you was, an' he says the French won't be licked till after the pow-wow days."

She had reference to the thawing spell in February, when the Ohio and Far Indians are supposed to hold council and plan the Summer's deviltries.

"The French will be whipped as soon as we find them. How's your husband?"

"Been sick from eating so much meat, but fair to middling now. Mortal grief, but you oughter see the children watch the crops. They're mighty tired of nothing but meat, an' turkey-breast for bread. Now we know the French are going to be licked we'll raise bigger crops this season.

"If that Braddock don't hurry up an' lick the French he's meaner'n a man who'll kill deer in Winter when the meat is all lean an' stringy. Ain't seen hide nor hair of any one since that Little Cove man was here. An' he talked like he didn't know nothing. He said there wa'n't no one in the two coves that'll fort this Summer, but just stick to their planting. Why can't you stop a few days an' be neighb'ly?"

"Just long enough to say howdy, and that Braddock needs recruits and is paying three pounds sterling to every man who enlists. I see you, Simon Flax! How do you do?"

Flax, with an ashen bowl in his hand, was peering out the door. He recognized me, but before he would advance and give us greeting he needs must duck back into the cabin and hastily cover up something with a bear-skin. This bit of secrecy was but a part of his play at being mysterious. He was mightily glad to see us, but had little chance to talk as his wife's tongue clacked and sputtered at a prodigious rate. The lonely soul was hungry for a new pair of ears to address, and there was small chance for even the children to get in a word until she was quite out of breath.

They urged us to eat with them, but we had our own wallets and rations, and when we refused the children looked much relieved. We told her of the witch-hunt in Big Cove and thereby provided her with a new line of thought for the next ten months. Scarcely that number of weeks would pass before she would hear news which would last her a lifetime! She garrulously explained several infallible ways of detecting a witch beyond all doubt. Cromit at once became deeply interested and begged her to divulge the best and easiest way.

In great spirits at having a new audience she solemnly said:

"If a woman's a witch she'll surely have a small red spot, shaped like a turkey's foot, in the middle of her forehead an' at the edge of her hair. It's the spot set there by the devil to show he's bought her soul. Witches always wear their hair loose to cover up the spot, but you can see it if grab 'em an' push their hair back."

"She had her hair hanging over her face," murmured Cromit.

"Then it's sartain she had the devil's spot," triumphantly cried Mistress Flax. "Land's grief! But I can tell 'em faster'n they can cast a spell, or shoot a hair-ball into a cow."

Flax held up his big hands, larger perhaps because of the muscular strength developed in turning bowls, and changed the subject by remarking:

"I'd fancy sinking my hooks into the biggest Frenchman at Du Quesne. After we lick 'em there oughter be a pretty hunk of land for everybody. At least a good four hundred acres."

"There'll be no land for Quakers, nor Germans, who won't help the colonies carry the fight to the Allegheny River," I discouraged him. "Virginia was the first to make a fight against the French at Du Quesne, and only those who help to drive them out will be remembered."

Flax scratched his wiry beard and meditated over my statement. His wife gave a long recital of the children's ailments for the last year, and when she paused to get her second wind, her husband abruptly announced:

"I'm going to the war, maw. You stick here and look after the crops and the younkers. I'm going to git new land where there's plenty of ash. What with folks coming in to McDowell's and spreading out I begin to feel crowded. I ain't comfottable less'n I have plenty of elbow-room."

"Mr. Brond was saying as how Braddock was giving three pound sterling to every man who j'ines the army, Simon," she said.

"Well, three pound ain't to be laffed at. If ever I go to a settlement it might come in might pert. So that's settled. You can manage alone all right."

"We'll worry along somehow, Simon," she assured him with no hesitation. "But you leave me the gun and make Braddock give you a new one. An' don't let the dog foller you."

"Three pound and a new gun just for licking the French! That Braddock must be a mighty fine man."

"We'll soon march into Du Quesne. The French will run back of the Ohio and north of Lake Erie. That'll throw all the western country open, and you'll find plenty of elbow-room," I said.

Thus easily was another recruit gained for Braddock. Mrs. Flax took her husband's departure with no show of emotion. That she must stand guard over the clearing and her three small children, keep the larder filled and care for the growing crops, dismayed her none. She began overhauling her husband's simple garments, and repaired rips in a second pair of moccasins. We stayed there that night and left early in the morning.

The parting between the couple was void of any show of sentiment. But after he had kissed her and the children good-by, and had promised, at their earnest request, that he would bring back some French "sculps," I noticed she did not remain in the doorway to watch us out of the clearing but withdrew into the cabin. Only God knows how the women of the far frontier needed to keep close watch over their nerves in that first Summer of the French and Indian War.

On our way to the Onondaga's camp Cromit remarked—

"She'd be quite a fetching-looking woman if she'd tie up her hair."

"Keep your clumsy talk off my woman," growled Flax.

"I was speaking of a different woman, one I don't want no part nor parcel of till I git a squint at her forehead," explained Cromit.

Round Paw did not fancy Flax as a member of our party. Flax was a mystery-man, a worker in magic. True, his ashen bowls were innocent enough and most excellent tableware, but the process of turning them so smooth and round must be based on sorcery, and at any moment the settler might see fit to use his uncanny power in putting a black spell on a gun or ax.

There was no doubt in the Onondaga's mind as to the strength of the white man's magic. It was white magic of the French who had in 1754 killed Scruniyatha, the Half-King, who boasted of having killed Jumonville at the Great Meadows skirmish in the Spring of 1753. The fact that the Half-King died at the home of John Harris at Harris' Ferry (Harrisburg) in the Fall of '54 did not interfere with the widespread belief among the Indians that he was slain by French witchcraft. Doubtless the French encouraged the belief so as to hold their allies to them and to weaken the courage of those tribes who were inclined to pick up the English ax.

Round Paw would no longer take the lead but came the last in line; this to prevent Flax from stepping on his shadow. Nor would he, when we camped, sit on the same side of the fire with the bowl-maker.

WE MADE good time to Isaac Colliars' place on the Potomac, near where the Great Warriors' Path from the Cherokee country cuts the river, and some ten miles from Will's Creek. There was no sign of life about the cabin, but as the latch-string was out we looked inside to make sure no tragedy had overwhelmed the family. Everything was in order with no signs of a hasty departure. The spot was more exposed to an Indian attack than those settlements farther removed from the ancient path.

The Cherokees, now numbering between two and three thousand warriors, did not attempt to conceal their preference for the French. They favored English trade articles, and the proximity of the English settlements held their fiercer passions in restraint; but they preferred the French to the Saxons. While sagacious enough to avoid any general conflict with the English there was no telling what fate might be extended to an isolated cabin built along one of the old trails. Surely they had suffered enough at the hands of some of my race to feel inclined toward reprisal. We made our camp in front of the cabin and dined on a turkey brought in by Cromit.

Cromit was proving himself to be a good traveling companion, only I never knew whether he was overcome with merriment, or was in one of his mad moods. He seemed to accept me as leader and was willing enough to heed my suggestions. With others he was inclined to be explosive. Round Paw thought highly of him, and privately informed me he must belong to the Bear clan because of his claws. In the

Onondaga's estimation that man was great who could kill a man with his bare hands. There are two classes of men I fear when trouble begins—the man who laughs and the man who weeps. Cromit had done both when all but killing the drover.

After we had eaten Flax expanded and boasted how his work had given him abnormal strength in his hands. He held them up before the fire for us to observe and admire. They were huge and out of proportion to his wrists and arms. The Onondaga grunted what I took be an approval. Cromit began to snicker. Flax, although of a stolid disposition, finally became annoyed and wanted to know what Cromit was laughing at.

"I was laughing at the notion of coming at hand-grips with you," chuckled Cromit, his eyes glowing with a reddish light as the flames danced above the crossed sticks.

"It would be tol'rable funny," agreed Flax with a slow smile. "I never met a man yet that I couldn't squooze blood out of his finger tips afore he could say his own name."

"I'm a slow talker, but you can't make my fingers show color," shrilly challenged Cromit.

I started to interpose an objection, for the red-head was as much of a puzzle to me as the Flying Heads were to the Iroquois. Round Paw, however, clapped a heavy hand on my shoulder as a hint I was not to interfere, and his nostrils quivered as he scented a trial of strength between the two men. In English he urged them on by saying—

"Too much talk like squaws."

It only needed the red man's scoffing to bring them to their feet. They stood grinning at each other, their half-opened hands held before them as they made ready to lock fingers in a cruel grip. Well, I always did enjoy the spectacle of two strong men, evenly matched, trying each other out if there is no detestable gouging; and so long as they were bent on entertaining the Onondaga and me I rolled to one side to watch them. Each was very confident. Slowly their hands met and fingers settled firmly between fingers. Flax got the jump on Cromit and smiled in his heavy fashion.

"Be you ready?" he asked.

"Fit's a fiddle. Never readier in my life," replied Cromit with his queer laugh. "When you say 'go' we'll begin to fuss."

"Yo-hah!" exclaimed the Onondaga.

"Go!" snapped Flax, jumping all his strength into his big hands.

In the next moment he was on his knees, howling in pain and nursing his wrenched fingers. Cromit threw himself on the ground and choked with wild laughter. Flax continued his groaning and bent half-double over his hands. I feared some bones were broken and that Braddock had lost a valuable recruit, but Cromit controlled himself long enough to say:

"Never hurt the bones any. Lor! I didn't let myself go. I never dast to. Some day I'll meet a man that's better dead; then somebody wants to look out."

"You're—you're a devil!" moaned Flax, and he experimented with each finger to make sure no bones were crushed.

"Tell the Injun I'll let him use two hands ag'in one of mine," said Cromit.

Round Paw did not need to have the challenge translated, and calmly requested:

"Tell the bone-breaker that if any one touches a man of the Wolf Clan he dies before he gives his death yell. I have said it."

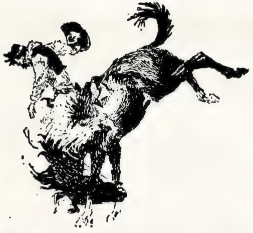
And he slipped a hand to his ax.

I interpreted this and Cromit sat up and studied the impassive face for half a minute, and then drawled:

"Ding me if he don't mean it. I ain't taking any fight to him. He's red and can't fuss just for the joke of it. Him and me have got a grip on the same hatchet. I'd mortally like to stand at his side if we're lucky enough to catch up with the French."

So in amity we made our camp and slept until the sun routed us from our blankets.

TO BE CONTINUED



KEGHEAD OUTLAW

by John Adams Whitehead

IT WAS the Feast of the Cowboy. At the fair grounds of the big Wyoming town humans and animals seethed like a disturbed colony of ants.

Keghead switched his haunches viciously with his tail and kicked impatiently at his belly. A big greenhead fly buzzed annoyingly around him and Keghead wanted to watch the game. He was impatient of interruption. He paid Martha Lowden only a scant attention, taking with royal action the lump of sugar she held to him, and turning again to a contemplation of the game, though Martha Lowden was his only friend.

Of all the collection of talented broncos that milled round the big pens at the fair grounds—spotted pintos, tawny buckskins, roans and blacks and grays—Keghead alone seemed interested in the events. Others munched hay or stood with drooping heads, asleep, or wandered about and fought flies. Keghead, neck over the top bar of his individual pen watched *Hippy* Shannon ride Flashlight. He watched Flashlight twist and plunge. He watched Shannon's spurred heels rake him from shoulder to flank. He watched Shannon's quirt sing through the air and bite viciously into Flashlight's hide.

Shannon's ego demanded that he do things differently from the ruck of men, and in his riding he packed a quirt—and used it. Flashlight, spent and heartbroken, quit cold and stood quivering but immovable while Shannon dug the wicked long shanked spurs into his bloody sides and cut him with the quirt in an endeavor to stir him into action.

Something of the feeling of an expert viewing a tyro stirred Keghead as he watched; a sort of contempt. He seemed to be going over mentally the way he, Keghead, would have gone after this rider; rehearsing in his equine mind the way he had gone after each of those riders who in the last three days had tried without success to ride him.

He saw Shannon dismount, a victor. Saw him carried away on comrades' shoulders and the crowd begin to disperse for the day.

Keghead turned away and took a turn about his pen. To him Shannon was simply one of those devils in big hats and hair pants that must be fought. He did not know that tomorrow was the day of the finals and that he, Keghead, had qualified with Shannon for the big event of the final day. He did not know that Shannon had ridden his mount each day to a finish and was hailed as the premier rider of this show.

Keghead did not know these things nor care. He knew that himself, Keghead, had not yet felt the humiliation of having to quit with a rider on his back. He had a comfortable feeling of work well done and turning, nuzzled a pile of hay; selected a sweet wisp and began munching it.

Martha Lowden left him and with her girl friends walked across the grounds.

"I sure want Keghead to pile Shannon tomorrow," she told them. "He needs to find some horse can do it, and Keghead owes it to him. Funny part is, Shannon don't know him." Her laughter rippled merrily as she thought of this.

Keghead had worked for his success. He had not always been the first-magnitude star he was to-day. Like human beings, he had passed through his share of discouragements and reverses, and his career had been a stormy one.

The February day on which he first glimpsed this world was thick with a blizzard and way up in a lonesome corner of Wild Basin under the spruce his mother had selected he had shaken his short neck and long, ungainly legs to get the snow out of his eyes and off his curly black hair and cuddled under her haunches to get away from the storm. That Summer he ran the range with never a care or an interruption, and then in the Fall came the men in big hats and chaps and rounded up himself and his herd and drove them into corrals.

Here were hatched his first bitter memories of these things in hairy chaps and big hats. Two of them caught him and threw him roughly to the ground and one of them sat on his head. This didn't hurt him. It surprized him. The thing that hurt was something sizzling hot that they pressed against his flank and it pained and frightened him so that he whinnied in terror for his mother who came up and, when they released him, nosed him to see if he were all right.

After that for a long time there was a spot on his flank that hurt when he moved or shook himself. This gradually wore away and even the memory of it became dim, but it gave him his first suspicion of men.

Two years later when the riders came again to the range Keghead had developed. His neck was no longer ridiculously short; too short to reach the ground without bending his knees, nor his legs ridiculously long and dangling. His coat no longer tight and curly nor his tail a bushy little stump. Now, his neck was slender and graceful, his legs, slim and tapering, were white up to the knees, and with big muscles that rippled under the black skin. His coat was long and silky and his tail hung low and full.

He was as big as his mates and his form one of peculiar grace and his gait an easy, cushiony one. He attracted attention with his graceful figure and white front legs, and one of these riders had bought him.

In the corral he saw the men in big hats close in toward him on their horses; then a rope settled over his neck and was pulled tight, strangling him. Something told him to fight, and rearing back on his hind legs, his back bowed and his head jerked frenziedly from side to side in an endeavor to shake off the rope that cut and choked. His front feet, pawing the air, were suddenly caught by another rope which pulled tight and jerked him with a thump on to his side. A third rope deftly thrown over his hind legs drew them together, and he lay impotent.

Keghead wondered at this treatment. He had done nothing to deserve it and a sense of fear and injustice possessed him. Then one of the men with a big hat pressed a white-hot iron across his flank, and with the flash of pain that came he remembered a previous experience of this kind that made his side sore for days. He began to struggle, but it was over and they eased off the ropes and let him up. They called it "venting" the old brand and with several others he was driven away to a new home.

Keghead's troubles seemed to come faster from this time on and new experiences with them. Next day he had to go through the humiliation of being roped and thrown, and to feel again the white-hot iron and the pain of the burn with its smarting and stinging.

This time they branded his front leg and with a different shaped iron; a new brand. When they loosed him he scrambled to his feet, jumped quickly away from them and pondered the meaning of it all. It seemed whenever these men came near him it meant trouble and rough treatment.

The memory was rankling when he felt again the rope fall around his neck and tighten, and he was pulled half-strangled, his tongue hanging out, to a post. He heard them say, "Ride him, boy!" then something was laid gently on his back. He shrank away at the contact, but it did not burn or sting as he expected.

Then he felt them pull the thing tight to his belly and still it did not hurt. The sense of fear that he had first felt at these things in Stetson hats and chaps gave way to anger; a desire to fight. That seemed the only way. He resented the treatment and wanted to show it.

Next he felt a man climb gently into the saddle, and the rope was thrown off his neck. He was free. Free, but with a man on his back. He trotted a few steps, then stopped as if to take in and weigh this new sort of freedom.

The man moved, quietly adjusting himself in the saddle. Then Keghead felt something sharp sticking into his ribs and memory flooded with his wrongs. High into the air he flashed like the recoil of a rubber ball, and with viciousness and determination began his first fight. In a minute it was over. In his rage he dashed himself against a post and threw the rider, then wheeling like a flash his heels shot out just missing the man's head. They sent the big hat flying through the air.

Somehow he felt better after that. It was as if his self-respect were restored. His fear of big-hatted men dropped a shade and a measure of self-confidence rose in him.

It took a week for this owner to recover, but as soon as he was well he had solemnly sworn, "Never again!" and sold Keghead.

FRIENDS called his new owner Hippy Shannon and Hippy christened him Blacksnake. To horses, Hippy was a caveman. In a country where busters range from eight years to eighty he was the buster supreme. He studied habits and could anticipate moves, but he had no slightest shred of sympathy for horse nor understanding of horse-nature.

"Fan 'em! Scratch 'em! Stick 'em till they quit!" This was wine to Shannon's spirit. Some way, any way they must be busted.

During his short stay with this man, Keghead's opinion of men soured completely. He grew to hate them: Shannon most of all.

The Flying M cow outfit was owned and managed by Jim Lowden. Jim Lowden was owned and managed by twenty-year-old Martha Lowden, his daughter. When Shannon was not riding at the big shows he broke horses for the Flying M. It kept him in training, and it was to the Flying M that he brought Keghead. With his coat of shining black and his white front feet Martha Lowden took a fancy to him and fed him sugar. She became the one person that Keghead permitted as friend.

And once more with this man Hippy he went through the same harsh treatment, being thrown on his other side and the searing iron pressed hard against his leg. Curls of greasy smoke rose up from his body. The sound of frying flesh came to him and with it the pain he knew; that pain that would last for days was shot to his brain over tense nerves. An added indignity was put on him at this time and with a savage effort he had thrown off the man who sat on his head, and had smelled of Shannon with the hot iron.

Immediately two of them grabbed his head and, throwing it forcibly to the ground, lay on it with their whole weight. His head held fast, his feet tied, he was helpless, but he had smelled the one who was the chief offender and a memory that would last through life burned its way like a branding iron to his brain.

All men were devils. He must fight them like the devil, and Shannon was the chief devil of them all.

This thought grew during his stay here. Two or three mornings each week Hippy would rope him to a post, saddle him, then get on and ride him. Keghead fought bitterly, but Keghead was a novice, Shannon, a master, and the battles were one-sided. Shannon packed a quirt when he rode; ostensibly it was to rouse the horse; to make him fight. But in the man was a devil's streak that delighted to cut with it, to see a horse cringe and quiver under it, and Keghead felt it more than once during his stay with Shannon.

One day Martha Lowden watched Shannon ride Keghead and she saw him use it.

Keghead had an off day. He did not feel like fighting and when Shannon saw this he set his teeth and swung the quirt. It hissed through the air and cut into the black body and Martha shrank as if struck herself. Keghead jumped with fear. He rushed about the large corral, crashed into a post and jammed Shannon's leg. Again the quirt rose and fell, this time full and heavy across Keghead's head. It lashed into his eyes and blinded him. Straight across the enclosure he dashed, insane with fear.

Shannon slipped out of the saddle to the ground, and Keghead struck the heavy corral poles with his head and breast and dropped to the ground quivering. He tried to rise but fell back. As he fell the girl screamed. Just one word, "Shannon!" Then, frightened and angry, she came running over, her eyes flashing fire, and stood before him. Her voice trembled.

"Shannon! Get your stuff and get out of here. Don't you take that horse either.

I'll pay you for him. Don't ever put your foot on this ranch again. If I were a man I'd take that quirt and beat you 'till you dropped. You're a brute! A beast! Get out!"

She knelt beside Keghead, and watched the painful twitchings of his body as he slowly regained control of himself. She held her head down and crooned to him, and he nickered softly, whimpering like a hurt child.

"You'll get him, boy, some day," she whispered.

After a while he pulled himself to his feet, and loosening the cinch she pulled the saddle off and led the horse away.

So Keghead found a new owner. His spirit remained unbroken, and his intense dislike of all men became keener.

"I want him trained," Martha told her father. "Some day he'll meet Shannon."

They fed him grain and it made him high spirited. They placed dummies on his back and he fought till he piled the dummy.

He was like a prizefighter in training. He tried new tactics; learned new methods and his muscles became tough and pliable as spring-steel. Not knowing his name they rechristened him Keghead. They took him for long rides in box-cars and then the men in high-heeled boots and spurs would try to ride him, but he would not submit to this from any man. Keghead was an outlaw.

His cunning grew with this sort of practise and the number of those who could ride him became fewer and fewer. He was resourceful, and when his bag of tricks failed to throw his man, he acquired new ones.

Keghead's fame through the western country grew apace. His performance at the shows was that of a star. Sleek, black and shiny and with muscles grown powerful and supple from much practise, he worked fast when they turned him loose and usually with a few sinuous and surprizing and body-racking jumps his rider was piled.

And tomorrow Hippy Shannon was to ride him.

Night dropped gently over the fair grounds. Through the clear western air stars danced brilliantly and Keghead unconscious of tomorrow, nosed around for a minute; selected a spot and lay down.

In town, the overflow of surging humanity milled around like cattle at a giant round up. Restaurants sang a symphony of rattling dishes and shuffling feet and soda fountains and cold-drink parlors tinkled to the ministrations of white aproned soda jerkers and bartenders. Cowboys and cowgirls; dudes and dudeens; fakirs and vampires, squirmed through the crowds.

Picture theaters showed "Westerns" to packed houses of Westerners, and western Easterners. Streets and buildings with gay-colored pennants and banners of welcome seemed a waving sea of color.

Autos weaved through the crowds like frightened snakes, and broncos with riders poised easily in the saddle dashed madly about, their hoofs rattling on the pavements, their tails flying.

Among all this welter of sound and color and motion, Hippy Shannon moved like a planet with its satellites, as prominent as the heart of a daisy within its border of white petals. They had bet on him at odds of three to one for the past three days and he had not failed them. Tomorrow the odds would drop to even money when he rode Keghead.

Shannon's cruelty to his mounts had been commented on many times these past days. Scarred and bleeding ribs were carried by the horses he had ridden: unnecessary scars, unnecessary blood. He seemed to take a delight in his cruelty.

"Ride 'em! Don't pet 'em," he said. "Jab 'em! Don't tickle 'em," and his admirers laughed. If you were successful you could get away with it.

In the barber-shop Hippy stepped into the chair and said briefly—

"Cut her."

"How'll you have it?" asked the obliging artist, and Hippy was stumped.

"Oh! Just cut her nicely," he ordered lamely and settled back in the chair.

"You feelin' nervous, Hippy?" some one asked.

"'Bout what?"

"'Bout gettin' throwed off o' Keghead."

"Not a-tall."

"I suppose you ain't never been throwed."

"Not since I learned to ride," Hippy countered and a laugh went up from the chairs.

"I reckon you're due to find you got somethin' to learn," sneered his questioner. Then he hummed:

For they ain't no horse
That can't be rode,
And they's no buckaroo
That can't be throwed.

"I'm waitin'," Shannon answered confidently when the song ended. "An' you can find plenty of money says I can ride him if you're honin' to bet."

"*Would* take a little bet you cain't ride that Keghead hoss." His challenger drawled and half a dozen hands offered it to him. Interest in the big event burned among them like a fever.

Out in his pen at the fair grounds Keghead dozed and the night passed and at last the great tomorrow came—the day of days.

After the noon meal the town began to empty and the fair grounds to fill. Fewer and fewer autos scurried around the streets. Shops and stores closed and drink parlors became silent until at two o'clock the pennants and banners waved over a deserted village.

Only a few poor unfortunates, who for one reason or another were compelled to stay in town, were to be seen. All others were at the stampede, crowding the stands or lining the enclosures with elbows on rails, and waiting for things to start.

From his pen Keghead looked across to the big grand-stand with its rippling flags, its moving thousands and its myriad noises, and his thin pointed ears worked back and forth nervously. He looked to right and left quickly as if to see if any of his fellows were being taken over there. He was to have a part in all this festivity soon, he knew, and his fighting blood was warming.

In the stands there was the low murmur of talk sprinkled with an occasional crescendo of laughter and the rustling of programs. Then the band blared forth and the feast of excitement started. A group of riders came racing over from the corrals and stopped in a cloud of dust before the grand-stand. The band stopped playing and the announcer lifted his megaphone.

"La—a—dee—ees a—and gent—ul—mun," he bellowed, "the first e—vent will bee—ee trick and fancy roping by Burk Brady," and with a wave of his hat the fun began.

Four galloping horses came down the stretch neck and neck. Burk Brady twirled his rope over his head, threw it from him with a series of rapid graceful steps that enlarged it to the proper size, then gave a twist that sent it rolling across the track like a great, thin hoop-snake just as the four horses came opposite him. They were caught.

Next came the cowgirls' quarter-mile horse-race and a group of four started with the gun and flew down toward the tape, the riders bent low. In a minute it was over and the winner was prancing coyly back to the judges' stand. With no let-up the excitement continued and again the announcer bawled his salutation.

"Buck Robbins will give an ex—u—bishun ride on Yel—low Fee—ver."

Two cowboys had each grabbed an ear of Yellow Fever and catching it between his teeth "chawed" it, holding the horse quiet until the saddle was put on and cinched and Buck Robbins climbed into it. Then they jumped aside and watched Robbins until Yellow Fever, tired of trying to unseat him, stopped bucking and he stepped off.

And Keghead watched it all, his alert eyes and nervous ears showing his interest; interest as keen as that of any of those people in the stands.

Next, trick riding. A bronc' galloped down in front of the grand-stand with the rider clutching the horn and swinging himself back and forth, touching the ground on one side and rising gracefully over the flying horse's back to touch the ground on the other and repeat.

Then steer bull-dogging from a racing auto. The steer was turned loose and went tearing down the stretch. An auto raced after it and drew alongside. The cowboy standing on the running board leaped through the air, caught the steer's horns, swung his whole weight under and twisted its neck until it gave in, came tumbling to its knees, and rolled over on its side, vanquished.

Then again came the announcer's roar above the crowd's murmuring.

"La—adee—ees a—and gent—ul—mun. I wish to announce that the next e—vent will bee—ee—ee the most important of the whole program! Hipp—ee Shannon will try—y—y to ri—ide Keghead."

He paused before Keghead's name; then shouted it in a sort of triumph. The buzzing in the grandstand increased. Necks craned toward the pen where Keghead watched the approach of Hippy Shannon and a group of cowboys with the saddle.

Other events seemed watery beside this red-blooded struggle. The horse whom no one had yet ridden, and the rider whom no horse had yet thrown, about to match cunning. The fever-pitch of excitement was at hand.

Interest was at a peculiar psychic stage resembling hysteria. Some bet on the horse, others on the man. Some hoped the man would win, others feared he would.

And leaning over a section of the enclosure fence Martha Lowden watched. She was nervous. She shifted her position. Her hands moistened and she wiped them. She hoped with all her heart that Keghead would throw Shannon; hoped he would do it as easily as he had those others, the past few days. She hoped, but she feared he might fail.

KEGHEAD eyed with suspicion the group coming with the saddle. They were going to try to ride him. His temper rose. His ears lay back tight against his head and his breathing became a series of suspicious, rattling snorts.

When the big gate began to swing in toward him, restricting his freedom of movement, his head jerked round at it, then back at the men. These devils were at their old tricks again. It was no use to let his heels fly at this narrowing prison either. He had tried that before and sore heels were the only result.

His head jerked rapidly this way and that to take in every move of gate and men and soon it was beside him giving him just room enough to stand. Then the saddle was carefully lowered from above on to his back. Hands extended gingerly through the bars, reached under him for the cinch and slowly pulled it tight.

Hippy Shannon, smoking a tailor-made and watching the proceedings, leaned forward.

"What's that old brand on his shoulder?" he asked.

"Flying M."

"I be ——!" He was a bit taken back. "It's little ol' Blacksnake. Thought I knowed them white stockin's in front. Used to own him. He shore is a devil too."

He came up close to examine the shoulder and Keghead turned his head to smell of the hand that was tracing the brand. Then he gave a long whistling cry almost like a human being in despair. A rush of memory took him back to a certain corral where he lay helpless on his side, his feet tied and held from the horns of other saddles, two men lying across his head, one other with a sizzling hot iron pressing against him. He recalled bloody ribs and quirt-stung head and eyes, and this smell——

A passion of hate, a madness swept over him. His teeth bared viciously. The whites of his eyes glared forth, and as Shannon, quirt in hand, climbed over the bars and eased himself down into the saddle, Keghead shivered at the touch and uttered a low moaning squeal of rage. Then the gate was opened and he plunged forth.

In the grand-stand men stood up to watch. Whoever won would win quickly. It would be a battle of minutes only, but it would be a royal one.

Across toward the stand came a twisting, plunging, black fury. Keghead's heels shot into the air wide apart and his tail spread out like a fan. His head buried itself between stiffened front legs that hit the ground like pile drivers and rose again into the air in a jack-knife.

His body bent like a steel spring into the famed sunfish, then snapped straight. Mane flying; tail flying; moving like a storm-tossed cork; rider lunging forward, or snapped backward but fanning him with the quirt at every jump.

"Ride 'im cowboy!" came from excited throats on all sides.

"Fan 'im Hippy! Scratch 'im! Rake 'im!" and from others: "Get 'im Keghead! Pile 'im ol' horse!"

The various urgings came and the shining black demon worked with the mania of a murderer. This thing on his back was the one thing he must beat.

Into the air he rose and his whole body shook like a huge black dog shaking water from himself and shivering wickedly at every jump, yet the hated thing stuck on him. There passed a minute of sinuous shakings and powerful twistings and the thing still clung to him. In a very madness of malice he threw himself over backward and the thing merely stepped off, and when he scrambled to his feet, it was back in the saddle again.

Immediately he was off, wriggling in the air like a snared trout and landing stiff-legged and solid, cruelly racking the rider on his back. Again into the air like a flash in a crawfish, jumping backward in great writhing plunges. Next bending and turning and snapping in the feared sunfish, but at each jump the man's hat struck him across the neck and the spurs raked his sides. The quirt was no longer in use.

He was completely mad with rage and never for an instant did he cease his fight.

The shouting stopped and now there was absolute silence on the field. The thump of hoofs, and the creak of leather were the only sounds. Girls stopped chewing gum. Women swallowed lumps in their throats. Men allowed cigarets to go out, and then came Keghead's effort supreme.

Caring nothing for himself; goaded to a wild purpose, a diabolical resolve to unload this devil that stuck like a burr, came three mighty efforts at sunfishing, bending double and swapping ends, then with a bound into the air his heels rose and his head sank down between his legs. The rider was thrown forward.

Higher rose the heels until they were straight up. They still came on; came over. He was turning a somersault and the rider was under him.

With a hollow thump he came down on top of his rider and something cracked. He jumped to his feet while Shannon lay still, and furious, turned like a flash, leaped high into the air and came down, his four hoofs close together, straight into the middle of this inert mass that had just now been fanning and raking him.

There was intaking of breath in the stands, and suppressed screams. The thing lay quiet. Keghead came up and smelled it. It did not move.

The girl at the fence covered her face with her hands and turned away. Then other riders came galloping up and Keghead trotted away. An ambulance dashed across the field. The crumpled figure that was Shannon was lifted into it and it rushed off. There was a conference of officials and one of them came forward to speak. He stood a few seconds, then took off his hat. He told them that Shannon was hurt—they did not know how badly.

Came a lull with minutes of vapid inaction. Cowboys wandered aimlessly with ropes or bridles, said a word with one, then turned to another. Broncos, left to their own devices, smelled about for a bit of grass. In the stands men turned to their neighbors and spoke a word or shook their heads. It was the doldrums of excitement.

From his pen Keghead watched and the satisfaction of the victor warmed him. It was a peculiar satisfaction; a hated enemy was vanquished, another sprig of laurel was added to Keghead's crown. It would be harder than ever to ride him now.

Gradually the hum of conversation increased. The movements of those out in front of the stand became more business-like. Presently the announcer lifted his megaphone.

"La—a—dee—ees a—and gent—ul—mun," came his stentorian song, "thu next e—vent will bee—ee—thu wi—ild horse ra—ace."

THE SUPERCARGO

by J. D. Newsom

Author of "The Red Road," "The Rain-Maker," etc.

HIS name was Guy Milder-Smith, which was against him, and he had the most ridiculous face I have ever seen on a man. A pug nose, round glittering eyes, no eyebrows, and a mouth hidden beneath a sandy-coloured mustache that had run wild and outgrown the upper lip. He was a small man and the ill-fitting white clothes he wore made him look smaller still, especially when he jammed on his oversized sun-helmet and went running about the streets in the middle of the day.

Of course, we always give a visitor a good time—put him up at the club and so forth, but we couldn't do much for Guy. He was too shy and retiring. He wouldn't drink and he wouldn't smoke and he wouldn't play poker. Well, we let it go at that and gave him the run of the reading room where he spent his time stumbling over people's feet because he was shortsighted. Then he would apologize until he got hot all over and his forehead, where the eyebrows should have been, twitched nervously. I tell you, he upset our casual ways. We had to be so darned polite to the little fellow.

And then we had nothing to talk to him about. He'd come out from Sydney to study marine zoology and he spent his days on the reef playing about with shellfish and things like that. Now New Caledonia is all right and we aren't all roughnecks, but Nouméa is no place for a scientist by the name of Guy Milder-Smith—he's apt to be lonely.

Well, he divided his time between the reef and the club for about a month, and we got used to him. We took turns talking to him, trying to make him feel at home, and one night big René Laprade, who'd just come down from the Solomons, dropped into a chair by his side and tried to do some entertaining.

Laprade is a giant of a Frenchman with a sun-baked face and a short black beard. He always shouts and waves his arms about even if he just wants the boy to fetch him a newspaper. But he's a good man without any nerves and he's got quite a lot of brains.

"Well," he said to Guy, speaking in English, "and how are you enjoying your stay among us?"

Milder-Smith went very red in the face and muttered:

"Nicely, thanks. Ev'body's very nice, thanks. Very kind of you to ask, thanks."

Laprade looked startled and winked across the room at me.

"Have you found anything of any interest out here?" he inquired.

"Oh, yes, thanks," wheezed Milder-Smith. "Quite a lot, quite a lot, thanks," and he plunged into a long account of his discovery, talking very fast to cover his embarrassment.

"How interesting," Laprade cut him short, "and are you going to stay with us long?"

"No, no," Milder-Smith shook his head apologetically. "I think I shall go up the coast next week to Pam. I want to investigate the nautilus, you know."

"You'll find living conditions rather rough up there," commented Laprade. "Where are you going to stay?"

"Oh, I don't know—" Milder-Smith looked vaguely about the room—"I don't know. Very nice of you to take such an interest, thanks. I'll manage somehow."

He was growing hotter and redder than ever, and Laprade out of kindness left him

"The Supercargo," copyright, 1923, by J. D. Newsom.

alone and came over to sit by me. We had a good deal of business to transact and a lot of it was of an urgent nature.

WE TALKED copra and cotton cargoes for a while and then Laprade, after a sharp look around the room, said to me:

"I got those fifty Kanakas for Stevenson. Put 'em ashore at North Bay. Stevenson was tickled to death. Couldn't get any labor at all on Malikolo."

"That's five hundred pounds clear profit," I said. "I've got three more orders. Two of 'em don't count for much and we needn't bother about 'em, but Hapgood wants a hundred natives on a three year contract. He's on Espiritu Santo. We shouldn't have much trouble running 'em down there."

Laprade waved his arms about and just managed to suppress a roar.

"One hundred natives! I can't get more than fifty on board the *Mugette*. That means two trips. And I have to go up to Choiseul to recruit now-a-days. The hurricane season's coming on, too. D'you think I want to be wrecked in that leaky tub for a few hundred pounds?"

I had heard that sort of argument before and knew how to deal with it.

"Hapgood's in a hurry," I told him. "I'll tell you what I'll do. We should clear twelve hundred pounds on the two trips. If you agree to start this week I'll let you keep seven hundred as your share."

Just then Milder-Smith came cruising along hunting for a year-old copy of Punch or something and fell over Laprade's long legs. His glasses fell off and he laughed weakly as he apologized.

"Awfully sorry, you know," he stammered. "So sorry. My eyes—" and he wandered off, groping about like a ship in a mist.

Laprade scowled after him, for nobody likes to be heard talking about Kanakas and recruiting. It's not too dangerous if you're French, but it means a lot of trouble if you happen to be British. You see, the New Hebrides are administered by Great Britain and France. They call it a condominium but it's the next best thing to a pandemonium. The islands don't belong to anybody—two sets of governors, two sets of officials, two sets of laws, and every man in the islands trying to grab as much as he can for himself.

The Frenchmen can do pretty well what they like with regard to labor. They can import Chinese or Javanese, they can use the local natives or they can recruit from the other islands. Now the British planters are only allowed to employ the Kanakas of the island where they are working and recruiting is looked upon as a crime. That sort of thing doesn't help to improve international relations.

Some time back a fellow called Blake couldn't get anybody to pick his cotton so he rustled around and brought over a gang of natives from another island. His neighbour, Taillefer, promptly wrote to the British authorities and Blake found himself so heavily fined that he had to sell out. Taillefer is running both plantations now. Not every Frenchman would do a thing like that, but it does happen, and they aren't the happy family they might be in the Hebrides. That'll show you what I mean.

Now Laprade and I have been trying to keep everybody satisfied. We go around picking up cargoes of cotton and copra and if a trader tells us that he needs twenty or fifty boys, why, we try to oblige him. Usually it can be done quite easily, but sometimes the gunboat from Vila comes poking around and we have to do some quick thinking.

Laprade at last stopped scowling at Milder-Smith's back and turned to me.

"That's a bargain, Martin," he said. "I'll start next week. Are you coming?"

"Yes," I answered, "Nouméa's too hot at this time of year, and I need a blow."

Laprade nodded his head and stared at Milder-Smith who was fluttering about the magazine table.

"There's only one danger," he said at last. "You know Corbett has been suspicious lately. He chased me all around in that gunboat of his. Luckily he only picked me up after I had landed Stevenson's boys and I didn't much care if he did shadow me. But it might be unpleasant if he did that sort of thing regularly."

"Quite right," I agreed, "but in those waters all the odds are against him. You can off-load at night and unless he's actually on the spot he can't do anything."

A WEEK later, in November, we sailed from Nouméa. One way and another we had been kept fairly busy and I had lost track of Milder-Smith, but the night before we left I was pleased not to see him in the reading room. Somebody told me he had gone up to Pam by the mail-boat and I breathed a sigh of relief. Somehow, he spoiled the atmosphere of the place—he made me feel just as nervous and excited as he appeared to be.

We had good weather for the first three days; then when we were just off the northern end of New Caledonia it began to blow a gale and there was a tremendous current sweeping out into the Pacific. It's a bad place and we made for Pam as fast as we could, for the *Mugette* can't stand much rough weather. She's old and rotten and her auxiliary engine is about as dependable as her half-breed engineer.

We went ashore to see Vilgrain, who runs a cattle ranch up there, and the first man we met on the beach was Milder-Smith. He seemed very much worried. He stood there in the rain watching us and hopped from one foot to the other he was so excited.

"Hello there, little one," Laprade greeted him. "You seem to have strayed far from home. Aren't you afraid the Kanakas will get you? They aren't quite up to Sydney University standards yet."

Milder-Smith laughed weakly.

"Oh, I'm perfectly all right, thanks," he answered. "Mr. Vilgrain has been awfully nice to me. But——"

"Well," Laprade interrupted him, "we're going to see him. No good standing here with the rain running down our necks. First thing you know we'll all have fever."

We trudged through the downpour to Vilgrain's house and all the time Milder-Smith was trying to say something, but it never got beyond his jerking Adam's apple until we reached the veranda and began to shout.

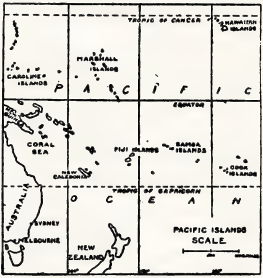
"Mr. Vilgrain has gone inland," he managed to say at last. "He's rounding up his — er — cows — cattle, — er — you know what I mean."

We didn't mind that very much. Vilgrain was a sour-faced fellow who had been a sergeant in the colonial infantry and had never quite recovered from his parade-ground manners, so we drank his rum and sprawled about in his chairs while Milder-Smith hopped up and down trying to imitate the perfect host. He gave us the creeps.

"For the Lord's sake sit down," Laprade said at last. "I want to rest while I have a chance."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Mr. Laprade," chattered Milder-Smith. "So very sorry. Do forgive me. I meant no offense—and there's one thing I so particularly want to ask you."

Then he began to walk up and down again and he didn't seem to know what to do with his hands. First he would put them in his pockets, then up to his face, then he'd pull at his coat, and then begin all over again. He simply couldn't keep still.



Laprade got up, took him by the shoulder and forced him to sit down.

"I can't stand you," he said good-humoredly. "If you go on squirming like that I'll have to go back to the *Mugette* and the cockroach powder. Sit still and tell me what you want. Is it drink or money or what?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Laprade," mumbled Milder-Smith. "I've quite enough money and I never drink, thanks, but it's most awfully important."

"What is it?" shouted Laprade.

Milder-Smith's Adam's apple gave a few hundred jerks before he was able to answer:

"I came up here thinking that I should find it a suitable locality to study the habits of a certain species of nautilus. I was misinformed, I am sorry to say. Most unfortunate. The type I am seeking does not frequent this region. I am wasting much valuable time. Mr. Vilgrain who has taken an interest in such matters, told me that I should find this species off the coast of——"

"But what do you *want?*" yelled Laprade. "*Quel idiot!*" he added to me. "He should be back in his nursery."

"Give him a chance," I replied. "He means well."

"I do," agreed Milder-Smith. "Indeed I do. When I saw you gentlemen come ashore I thought that perhaps you would be willing to assist me. I am stranded here, but I really must make a brief survey of several islands—Aurora, Vanua Lava and Utupua. I have been trying to get across to Vila, but Mr. Vilgrain tells me that I must return to Nouméa. Perhaps you——"

"Well," laughed Laprade, "you've got the courage of your ignorance. You saw the *Mugette* from the beach and if you want to join us I think it could be managed, but you won't enjoy the adventure. What do you think, Martin?"

I didn't like the idea, but I thought it seemed rather unkind to leave the little fellow stranded there in the rain with nothing to do but look at the mountains and the sea and the black boys.

"Let him come along," I answered. "It'll give him a chance to see life. We can leave him at Utupua, go on up to the Solomons and pick him up again on our way back."

"I'm ever so much obliged, thanks," stammered Milder-Smith. "You're awfully kind. I'm sure I sha'n't bother you."

"Better not," assented Laprade with mock gravity. "We're a tough lot."

We ate some of Vilgrain's yams and a couple of his chickens and went back on board later in the day when the weather calmed down.

Milder-Smith's eyes opened wider than ever when he saw the *Mugette* at close quarters. She is about as good as the average run of island schooners although I admit that she compares unfavorably with some of the modern oil-burning liners. You can't expect a Kanaka crew to keep a boat clean and our class of trade would make a shambles of the best boat afloat. The little man dropped his suit-case on the deck and tried to take in everything at once.

"Where, may I ask, am I to sleep?" he inquired.

"Please yourself," answered Laprade. "We sleep on deck or in the imitation chart-room when it rains. Make yourself at home."

"Don't you ever go below?" Milder-Smith didn't seem to relish the prospect of so little privacy.

Laprade roared with laughter.

"What innocence! No, little one, we don't go below—cockroaches. Plenty big fellas, too plenty big even for me. We give 'em the run of the boat. It's the wisest plan."

"Oh," said Milder-Smith. "Oh!"

Then he put his suit-case on the hatchway and sat down.

He didn't enjoy the trip very much. We had to keep out of sight of Vila and passed close to Tanna where the volcano smokes and growls all the year round. There is always a moderate sea running there and the *Mugette* headed into it, rolling her bows under. Milder-Smith lay flat on the deck and tried not to look at the swinging mast. I don't know whether he succeeded, I was too busy trying to keep the engine going.

When we reached smooth water again Milder-Smith became quite talkative he was so thankful to us for what he called "our timely assistance." As a matter of fact, he became a nuisance. He was under foot everywhere, and Laprade and I found it more and more difficult to dope out the details of our plan of action.

At last we reached Aurora, and Milder-Smith scampered off in his lop-sided fashion to look for his pet cephalopods. We had business to do with one of the chiefs in the village and didn't get all his copra on board until just before sun-down.

"Where's that short-sighted moron?" grumbled Laprade as we stood watching the boys stow the cargo below.

Well, he hadn't turned up, so we sat down and discussed ways and means for the first time in many days without interference.

We were finding it increasingly difficult to get the Kanakas to volunteer to work on the plantations. They had had time to see that not so very many of the volunteers ever came back from the Hebrides and the survivors who made their way home didn't have very much to say for the system. We always tried to choose a fresh village or tribe, but with so many blackbirders in the game it wasn't always an easy matter. Laprade, however, knew all the tricks worth knowing and had never failed to get his men.

We had the whole thing nearly worked out when Milder-Smith came stumbling along the deck, shedding water all over us from his dripping clothes.

"Splendid day, thanks," he chirruped breathlessly. "So kind of you to put up with me. Almost priceless results. I want to mail a report about this to my people."

"What have you been doing?" I asked him. "Been diving for pearls or something? How'd you get so wet?"

"Oh, am I?" he stared at me in open astonishment. "Am I?"

"For Heaven's sake, get out of the way," ordered Laprade. "You're dripping sea water all over my legs."

"I waded out," explained Milder-Smith. "I thought you had forgotten me until the dingy picked me up."

"Guy," solemnly announced Laprade, "you're a silly fool. Don't you know the place is full of sharks and what not. You're too much of a strain, and I've got other worries besides your health."

"Yes, of course," agreed Milder-Smith, "I am so sorry. Really I am."

We came to look upon him as a harmless half-wit and didn't even bother, after that episode, to keep our affairs from him.

He didn't seem at all interested in our plans. When he heard that we were blackbirding he said, "How romantic!"—just like that—in his squeaky voice and wanted to know whether "the aborigines enjoyed the sea voyage." Laprade laughed until he cried and Milder-Smith stood there in front of him, hopping from one foot to the other, looking very perplexed and surprized.

WE WENT up slowly through the Banks and then north to Tikopea where Milder-Smith had his first look at a red-gummed Polynesian. He became so interested that he forgot to be frightened even though the natives aren't exactly quiet and refined. They swarmed over the *Mugette* yelling and talking vociferously, and wandered about ready to lay hands on anything that appealed to their fancy. They didn't have any copra for us, so we pushed on that afternoon and made straight for Utupua.

When Milder-Smith saw the island he wanted to know whether we were quite sure whether this was the right place, whether we hadn't made some mistake.

"You're getting on my nerves," Laprade told him. "Don't you think I know Utupua when I see it?"

"Well, you know," murmured Milder-Smith, "it doesn't look at all like Aurora or New Caledonia, or any of the islands we sighted. It looks so—er—unstable, you know what I mean."

Utupua is a low-lying island, shaped something like a kidney bean, with the usual fringe of cocoanut trees and any amount of mosquito-infested, sweating jungle. It doesn't look very inviting. Milder-Smith's agitation increased when he saw some of the unspoiled aborigines who greeted us ashore.

"How long d'you think you will be detained here?" he asked me when Laprade was busy bargaining with the head man for his stock of troca shell.

"A day or so," I answered. "We're in a hurry, but this old fellow usually has quite a pile of stuff to sell and we have to treat him gently. He's not ready to do business until he's been drunk twice."

Milder-Smith laughed nervously.

"Then—er—would you mind very much if—er—I concluded my work within the next twenty-four hours if—er—I went on with you to your—er—ultimate destination?"

His uneasiness increased and he fidgeted like a bashful schoolgirl. He waved a hand at the natives milling around Laprade.

"I am not accustomed to these people. Distracting, you know. I have not Mr. Laprade's physique. I can only work when my environment is congenial. Here I am afraid that—well, you understand what I mean. And," he concluded weakly, "really, I have collected all the data I require. My investigation at Aurora was very satisfactory. I hope my report safely reaches Sydney."

"You work fast," I said to him. "I thought you would be quite busy here for a couple of weeks."

"What's all this?" inquired Laprade who had thrust his way through the black throng. "Don't you want to settle down here, little one?"

His tone always bothered Milder-Smith.

"I don't know how to explain," he stuttered. "I have done——"

"Oh, you poor little coward," laughed Laprade. "Go on, hop back on board.

You're about the most useless specimen of mankind I have ever seen. In France we should call you a *femme manquée* and you would deserve the epithet."

So we took him up to Choiseul and the sight of him became a source of irritation to us both. If at times he got cuffed out of the way he had only himself to blame, for he was always under foot, stumbling and staggering all over the narrow decks. He would pick himself up, wipe off his glasses and apologize for having been knocked down.

"I know I'm a nuisance," he would say; "I'm ever so much obliged to you for your hospitality. Do forgive my ignorance."

"Oh, shut up," snapped Laprade, "and listen to this. When we reach Choiseul tomorrow we shall have to work fast. I want you to keep absolutely out of the way. There may be a little trouble and the slightest mishap will throw our plans out of gear. I don't want to see or hear from you. And I shall thank God the day I can put you ashore again at Nouméa and see you *en route* for Sydney. You bother me."

Milder-Smith flapped his arms helplessly.

"I wish I could explain—" he began.

"Go away!" bellowed Laprade. "Go away and keep out of my sight!"

Next morning at dawn we plugged our way through Manning Straits and anchored off Cap Giraud, as near Choiseul as we could afford to go. It is a savage-looking island, dark green, steaming, hot, overtopped with low-flying gray clouds caught and ripped into ragged strips by the volcanic peaks. It rains every other day in the year and when it isn't raining the whole place is like a Turkish bath.

We didn't have to go ashore. The local people came out to us in their canoes, about twenty of them in each craft, and they sat about on the decks waiting for something to happen. If the Tikopeans looked unprepossessing these Solomon islanders were a good deal worse. Big and black, wearing their dead relatives' teeth strung in necklaces across their chests and other priceless ornaments of the same nature.

We gave 'em rum and square-face to drink and when they began to sing we managed to kick them by ones and twos down the hatchway into the hold. These were supplied with yet more rum before they had time to climb up on deck again and late in the afternoon, just before it started to drizzle, we had our cargo all safe and quiet down below. There must have been fifty-four or five lying all stacked up in the hold.

"Time to clear the ship," said Laprade and we started to get rid of our visitors as quickly as possible. All went well until somebody in one of the smaller canoes discovered that they were about eight men short.

Now a native always travels in his own family canoe; he's breaking all sorts of regulations if he sets foot in some one else's, and they raised a howl. All the other canoes turned back, and I ran aft to start the engine. Of course, it was dead and cold and I couldn't get it to spark. Outside I could hear Laprade bellowing at the natives, ordering 'em to keep off, but there were too many of them for him to handle.

Things began to look black, especially when some of our cargo woke up and began to hammer at the hatches. They were shouting down below, too, and it sounded like a zoo at feeding time. Laprade fired, and I knew they were trying to board us. Just then the engine turned over at last, and the water began to swirl beneath our stern.

I left the half-breed engineer in charge and hurried out to help Laprade. He was having a hard time beating off the black hands that were clawing at the railing. They were clinging to it as thick as swarming bees and I let 'em have it with a shot gun. That relieved the pressure, but they continued to climb up until suddenly the rotten old railing gave way and dumped the whole yelling crowd on top of the paddlers. That gave us a breathing spell —we needed it.

Suddenly there came an awful yell from the port bow and we jumped and dodged across as quickly as we could. We saw little Milder-Smith standing there, very red and flushed, holding an empty iron pot from the galley in his hands. A canoe was dropping astern and its crew were letting off the most blood-curdling hoots.

"What have you been doing, little one?" asked Laprade.

"Oh, I hope I haven't hurt them," gasped Milder-Smith. "You see, these people tried to creep up on this side while you were busy—er—ejecting those other people. Well, you see, I was just boiling some water for my bath, you know, and well, I—er—tipped it out on them when they tried to climb up. I do hope——"

"That's good work," chuckled Laprade, wiping his bloody hands on his trouser legs. "You've got the makings of a strategist—maximum results with minimum exertion. You're developing."

After that we went south toward Indispensable Reefs and then southwest toward Espiritu Santo. The weather was flat calm, not a breath of wind, and the *Mugette* couldn't shake off the odor of stale coconut oil which seems to be the favorite perfume in the islands.

Of course, we had some trouble at first with our cargo, but we adopted the usual tactics and after four days without food or water they began to acquire wisdom. Laprade had 'em on deck after that and told 'em they were going to work for good wages and that they'd go home again with enough money to buy a dozen wives apiece. That kept 'em quiet even though three of them died and the others wailed when we wouldn't let 'em keep the bodies but insisted on pitching them overboard.

ALL this time Milder-Smith went about very much as usual, apologetic and fussed, and Laprade forgot all about the boiling water episode. The hardest part of the job lay before us, and he grew irritable and sullen. Every time he saw our "Guy" stumbling about the cluttered decks he would knock him out of the way and curse him for his interference.

"I have never seen such a small man take up so much place," he growled. "I've got half a mind to let you swim back to Sydney. It's only two thousand miles. Do you good."

We were just off Cape Cumberland and headed for St. Philip Bay where Hapgood had started work. So far there had been no sign of Corbett and his gunboat and we felt fairly safe.

"If you don't mind," murmured Milder-Smith. "I'd much rather not swim all that distance. I'll go ashore anywhere if you're tired of me. I know I have been a nuisance, but I should like to get back to Sydney——"

Laprade had been drinking heavily and he laughed at the little fellow.

"No," he said suddenly. "I've seen enough of you. We've put up with you for a good long time. And you might give the show away. What say we dump him overboard, Martin?"

"Give him a chance," I urged. "He's harmless. Let's put him off where he'll stand a chance of getting home."

Laprade shook his head sullenly, and Milder-Smith backed away in desperate haste.

"I am—going—to—shove—you off," said Laprade. "The sight of you sickens me. Coward and fool, you'll be better off dead."

And he strode across the decks towards the shaking Milder-Smith.

"Drop it, Laprade," I said, "A joke is a joke. Don't frighten him to death——"

As I tried to stop him he caught me a vicious blow beneath the heart, and I sat down with the breath knocked out of my body. When I looked up he had caught Milder-Smith by the collar of his jacket and was dragging him towards the break in the railing. They looked for all the world like an irate father dragging his unwilling son to school. Then of a sudden Milder-Smith wrenched himself loose, jumped about six feet clear of the sweeping hand, pulled a gun from his pocket and leveled it at Laprade, who pulled himself up with a jerk.

When Milder-Smith spoke neither his voice nor his manner had changed, but, somehow, his words carried conviction.

"So sorry to have to threaten you," he chattered. "Very sorry. You've spoiled the climax. Most unfortunate!

"No—please don't come nearer. This pistol might go off. Beastly heavy pistol, you know. Hate such things, personally. Oh, do keep still!"

But Laprade refused to keep still and tried to grab the weapon out of the little man's hand. The gun went off and the bullet smashed his forearm.

"Now you will have to go to the hospital in Vila," moaned Milder-Smith. "Won't you keep still, and you, Martin," he turned to me, "I don't think you have a weapon, but please don't move. I'm so nervous I can't afford to take any risks."

Well, he tied my arms behind me and attended to Laprade who was rather badly injured. After that he explained himself to the engineer and the helms-man, who were quite ready to obey his orders.

Later in the day Corbett's gunboat nosed out of the bay and came alongside. Corbett greeted Milder-Smith with a broad grin on his face.

"Have much trouble rounding up these

fellas?" he inquired. "I got your letter. The chief on Aurora sent it on to me."

Milder-Smith's forehead twitched frenziedly.

"You received it safely? I'm very pleased. No, I didn't have much trouble. I went to northern New Caledonia, thinking these people were black-birding up there. I was on quite the wrong track. I'm awfully sorry—wasted government money. But they came ashore because it rained—that's right isn't it, Martin?—and they decided to take me along with them for the advancement of—er—marine zoology. Saved me an infinite amount of trouble. I found out definitely that they were our men when I overheard them talking while the boat was anchored off Aurora. I had to swim out from the shore and listen to 'em discussing plans. I didn't enjoy the experience. Sharks, you know. Well, here they are, lieutenant."

Just before we were transferred to the gunboat, I asked Milder-Smith, "And who the —— are you anyway?"

"Oh," he said, "I'm from the Admiralty, Sydney. Intelligence, you know. Sorry I don't look it. Most awfully sorry, Martin."

Well, we got a year apiece, and Laprade died of fever.

Me? Oh, I'm out of that game for life. These pineapples of mine are better than anything they can grow in Queensland. I'm planting another hundred acres next year. There's a growing demand for them.

And how do I get my labor? We grub along somehow. The local folk will work if you treat 'em right and it's astonishing what a fellow can do for himself if he tries. I spend three months in the year in Sydney, resting and taking orders. Usually I stay with Milder-Smith, he's got quite a nice place at Manly. He's a good fellow, even if his methods are peculiar. I like him.

EARLY COUNTERFEITING

by Hugh Pendexter

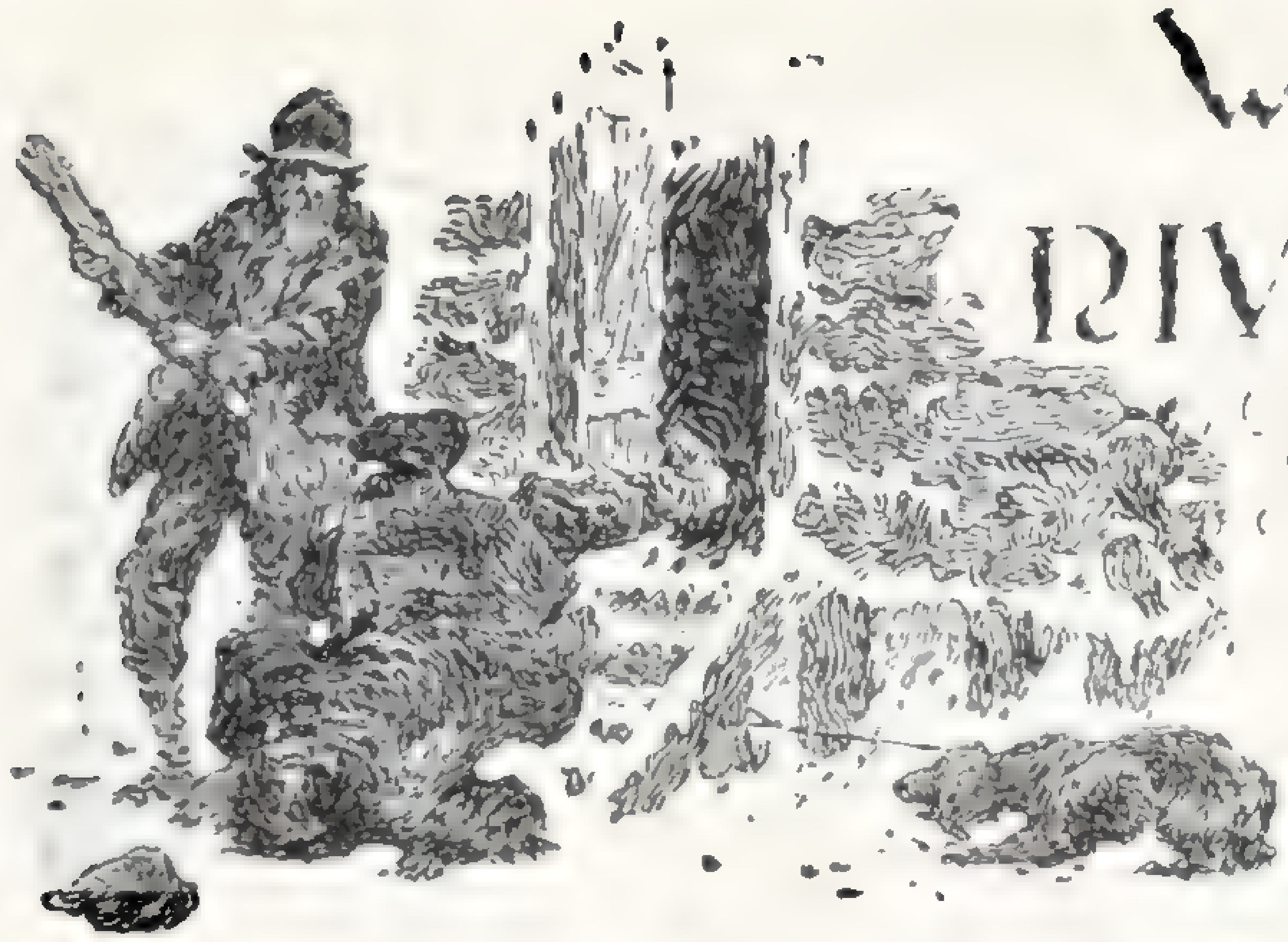
WHEN John Sevier became governor of the new State of Franklin—now part of Tennessee—he realized that the fourteenth Commonwealth must have a circulating medium; that currency was the blood of the social system. Of precious metals he had only a negligible store. He could not issue letters of credit on birchbark, though Pontiac had done so and the French had honored them, giving cash in return. So he studied the methods adopted by other American communities in meeting the same problem.

He found that in Massachusetts corn had been used for currency in 1631. A few years later musket-balls, "full bore," were legal tender in the Bay State, each standing for a farthing. Hingham, Massachusetts, paid its taxes in milk-pails in 1680. Fur, tallow and hides were used for currency in North Carolina in 1738.

Tobacco circulated as money in Virginia and Maryland for more than a hundred years. The currency put out by the colonies during the Revolution was poorly printed on poor paper. Some of it did not even contain any promise of payment.

Governor Sevier and his advisers decided that "good flax linen, two linen, wool and cotton linsey" should be used as currency. Also "beaverskin, six shillings. Ottoskin, six shillings. Raccoon and foxskins, one shilling and threepence. Well-cured bacon, sixpence per pound. Clean tallow, sixpence per pound. Clean beeswax, one shilling per pound. Good distilled rye whisky, two shillings, sixpence per gallon. Good peach or apple brandy, three shillings per gal."

There was one fly in the ointment. The skin currency was soon counterfeited. The skins were made up into bales and bundles, the protruding tails showing the kind of pelts inside. If the tail of an "otto" was fixed to the skin of fox or raccoon the counterfeiter made a profit of four shillings ninepence.



WHEN THE RIVER FROZE

by Boyd Fleming

Author of "Tombstone Cancels a Debt," "Partners," etc.

"I GUESS Black Peter is sure going to hang this time—and it's 'bout time!" remarked Jackson, the old storekeeper, with a grim nod. "He's 'bout the meanest whelp since I can remember, and I've seen a lot of mean whelps in my day!"

Twelve men, the male population of Jackson Flat, had gathered at Jackson's store to live over again, to the last thrill, the capture of Black Peter. Jackson Flat was little more than a logging camp crowded against the wilderness. It consisted of about twenty dwellings, a store, and a saw-mill. The saw-mill was a small affair that supplied the larger settlements to the southward with lumber.

Black Peter, several times a murderer, had been located by the sheriff that morning, his hiding-place an abandoned cabin within two miles of the saw-mill. All of Jackson Flat had taken part in the capture.

"Well, his goose is cooked this trip!" observed one of the men standing beside the rusty sheet-iron stove; Winter was near and the air chill. "He'll eat his grub in Livingstone jail tomorrow morning—unless he slips out from under the sheriff between here an' Livingstone."

"He'll go some to get away from Hendee!" scorned the old storekeeper. "I've known Hendee to hold worse'n him!"

The outer door opened, and a small, timid-looking man entered on quiet, moccasined feet. Behind him, almost tripping him, followed a shaggy, wistful-eyed dog of nondescript breed.

"Hello, Dad," chorused the men about the stove. "Why wasn't you down to lend a hand in capturing Black Peter this morning?"

"If we'd only had your dog," cried one of them, "we'd sure of scairt Black Peter out of his boots!"

This brought forth a loud roar of laughter that caused the dog to slink even closer to the little man's heels. The mild eyes of the little man snapped, and he gave a scornful sniff.

"I suppose a dog or two would have helped put a little stiffenin' in your knees," he said.

This called for another burst of laughter, but it was good-natured. There was not a man there but liked "Dad" Marsh. Marsh and his dog lived in a tiny, two-room shanty three miles out. He was a trapper and had lived there ever since Jackson himself could remember, and Jackson had preceded the saw-mill.

"How did the news get clear out to your place so soon?" asked Jackson.

"Injun Joe stopped in on his way over to White Branch," explained the old man. "I was some surprized to hear Peter had been holin' in so close by."

"It made us all think of our life insurance," grinned Jackson.

"He'd never dared come near Dad's place—with that savage dog around!" exclaimed one of the men.

"Never you mind my dog," snapped the old man. "He's not one of them kind that go round snarlin' like a bobcat and then climbing a tree when they see a rabbit!"

This brought more smiles. The old man's dog was of the type that never seems to have recovered from some form of fright, and they never grew tired of teasing the old man about it. Always the old man heatedly defended his companion.

A short time later Marsh, with his purchases in a bran-sack flung over his shoulder, moved toward the door. The dog leaped up and followed close behind. One of the men beside the stove gave a low growl and scuffed his feet. The dog backed toward the door, barking.

"Be quiet, Bruce!" snapped his owner, opening the door quickly so that the dog might make his escape from his tormenters. "Calves is always blattin' at dogs!"

The dog leaped through the open door, well in advance of his master, and at a safe distance set up a loud defiant barking at the men within. Marsh closed the door with a slam and shut out the sound of laughter. After patting the dog's head for a moment he moved swiftly toward home.

"I guess you're kinder faint-hearted, Bruce," he scowled at the dog. "I wish you'd learn better than to make a fool out of yourself every time that bunch of lumberheads starts their fool noise! Far as I go, I don't give a hang if you're scairt of your own shadow. We gets along pretty good without bitin' up the whole landscape; don't we, Bruce?"

For answer the dog rolled up a pair of loving brown eyes and wagged his tail. The next instant he was off to sniff loudly at the end of a hollow log.

As man and dog came in sight of their home, a weather-beaten structure of logs and unplaned boards, the man cast a thoughtful glance at the sky. It was gloomy with heavy, low-flying clouds. The wind was growing colder.

"Some snow coming before morning, Bruce," he said aloud. "It's time we got out our traps for across the river."

JUST beyond the cabin flowed a wide river. On the other side, and twelve hours' journey to the northward, Marsh had another cabin. This other cabin was little more than a lean-to, and marked the end of his Winter trap line. When the river was tightly frozen he traveled northward along this trap line in one day and back the next.

The cabin he was now approaching consisted of two rooms; a log structure with a board kitchen attached at the rear. The log structure had been built close to the edge of a small bank that bordered a tiny brook. The added kitchen now almost overhung this bank and steps led from the door to the ground.

Marsh suddenly noticed that the kitchen door was open and swinging with the wind. He decided that the length of twine with which he fastened it must have broken. The dog, leaping on ahead, reached the steps and then abruptly retreated, his lips snarling.

"Now what's the matter with you? 'Fraid of an open door?" growled the old man impatiently as he mounted the steps.

The next instant strong fingers clutched his throat and Marsh found himself flat on the floor of his own kitchen, staring up into the blood-shot eyes of a man with a dirty black beard. From outside, the sound of Bruce's frightened bark reached his ears.

For a moment the blood-shot eyes glared into his, and then the fingers loosened from about his throat and quickly searched his clothes.

"I don't pack any gun—if that's what you're lookin' for," said Marsh in a quivering voice.

With a grunt the stranger rose and jerked him roughly to his feet.

"Do you live here alone?" he asked gruffly.

Marsh nodded, one hand fingering his wrenched throat.

"Well, rustle up a little grub then—an' be mighty quick about it!"

The big man—he was little less than a giant—sank abruptly on a bench beside the solitary window which overlooked the back yard. Leaning beside the bench was the only firearm that Marsh owned, a repeating rifle of rather ancient model.

"Where's the slugs for this?" rasped the stranger, tapping the rifle.

Marsh nodded toward the bran-sack which had fallen from his shoulder. "I've been out of shells for a month," he explained, "and just went to get some."

The big man dumped the contents of the sack upon the floor and quickly found the box of ammunition. Tearing the box open eagerly he loaded the rifle and thrust the remaining shells into his pocket. Marsh, his face pale, nervously thrust kindling into the tiny cook-stove. Outside, Bruce continued to bark from a safe distance.

After loading the rifle the big man

returned to the bench and sat scowling at the floor as if lost in deep thought. Marsh examined him from the corner of his eye. He saw a brutal, animal-like face with little round blood-shot eyes. One eye was discolored and swollen, and Marsh noted his clothes were torn and his wrists covered with dried blood.

The big man seemed to feel the other man's gaze, for he glanced up quickly.

"Go on with that grub!" he snarled, and then fell into scowling thoughtfulness again.

Bruce continued to bark, and the sound seemed to get on the big man's nerves. Scowling, he went to the door and flung it open, and then raised the rifle. Marsh gave a startled cry and leaped forward to meet a blow that sent him sprawling. Once more the man raised the rifle, and then suddenly lowered it.

"Can't risk the noise," he muttered. Gripping the rifle by the barrel he went slowly down the steps.

Bruce retreated hastily, still barking. The big man followed as far as the woodpile, then dropping the rifle snatched up an ax. Bruce retreated a little farther. At last, with a curse, the man flung the ax, missing the dog by less than a foot. He returned abruptly to the kitchen.

"Go and make that purp shut up!" he snapped at Marsh.

Marsh descended the steps and walked toward Bruce, who sat barking beside the half-frozen brook a short distance from the wood-pile. Bruce, badly frightened, stopped barking but still retreated. Marsh followed across the brook and the dog slowly retreated toward the near-by timber.

"Far enough!" snarled the voice from the kitchen door. "Neat work, old man, but you can't float it! You'd like to get near enough to that timber to make a dash, eh? Black Peter ain't wantin' you to trot into Jackson Flat tonight!"

Suddenly his gaze fastened upon the little brook.

"Try that ice and see how thick she is," he said quickly.

Marsh tried it with his heel, making a hole from which spurted a little water.

"Mighty thin," scowled the big man as he turned his gaze toward the river along each bank of which a narrow strip of ice was slowly creeping outward.

"She's freezing fast," said Marsh, his gaze following the other man's.

"And the snow is coming fast," answered the other with a curse. "Now hurry that grub along! I don't like to eat by lamplight!"

Marsh hurried to fill the coffee-pot. He now understood why Black Peter was at his cabin. He had evidently escaped from the sheriff and now his only hope lay in reaching the other side of the river before the snow made it possible to track him. Northward extended the unbroken wilderness for miles. Southward, toward the settlements, every man and child would be watching for him.

During the cooking of the meal the big man paced restlessly about the cabin, pausing now and then to gaze from the window. Bruce continued to bark now and then, causing the big man to finger the rifle nervously.

After a time Marsh pronounced the simple meal ready and placed a few battered dishes on the rough table. He then nodded toward the empty wood-box and moved toward the door. The big man followed as far as the door.

"Bring in enough to last all night," he said with a twisted smile on his brutal face. "No going for wood in the dark—timber is too handy."

With an inward curse Marsh filled the wood-box to overflowing. It was very evident that Black Peter would see that darkness should not help matters for his prisoner.

With the coming of darkness Bruce stopped barking and shivered in the shelter of the wood-pile outside. He had partly recovered from his fright and once or twice whined for Marsh to let him in, but Marsh, fearing Black Peter's anger, sternly ordered him away.

"I'm sure glad I didn't bump off that purp," said the big man with a grin. "I guess no one will get within a mile of the shack tonight without his setting up a howl."

After the coming of darkness Marsh lighted a lantern in the kitchen. Black Peter promptly entered the darkness of the other room and seated himself where he could watch the kitchen door.

"I don't like the light," he said menacingly, "but just remember I've got an eye on you and the door!"

About ten o'clock Bruce set up a violent barking. Marsh and Black Peter leaped quickly to their feet.

"Someone's coming!" hissed the big man. "I'll stay here in the dark with the rifle and you act as if nobody but you was here. Be sure you act mighty natural! I'm in a corner and ain't afraid to shoot my way out! One funny move and I'll bump you off first shot! Whatever you do keep that dog outside—and yourself inside!"

Presently the reflection of a lantern flickered against the black square of window, followed by a man's voice.

"Hello in there, Dad! Tryin' to teach Bruce not to be scairt of the dark? I'm awful 'fraid he'll bite me!"

The next instant the door was flung open and a young man stepped inside.

"Hello, Bob," said Marsh in a tense voice. "What you doing out here in the dark?"

"I got some news for you," said the young man, his face suddenly growing serious. "Black Peter is loose again! He lammed the sheriff over the head and jumped off the train just as it pulled out of Kenton! They trailed him far as the big swamp below here, and he's in there now. We got a line of men out so he can't get out again."

"He might go through and come out on this side of the swamp," said Marsh in a harsh voice—half-expecting his remark to bring a shot from the dark room behind him.

The young man noticed the strained note in the other's voice and set it down as growing from fear that Black Peter might have made his way through the swamp.

"What good would it do him to come out on this side?" he shrugged. "He couldn't get any farther than the river. He couldn't swim it without freezing to death on the other side. He's still in the swamp all right—and it's startin' to snow. He can't get out without leaving tracks now. If he's between the river and the swamp we'll soon know it.

"Young Jackson is starting at the other end—and I at this end—to beat things up. After that we'll walk the edge of the swamp and watch for tracks. As soon as the river freezes we'll have another man walking the edge of that. Oh, we got him cornered tight enough!"

To this the other man made no reply. His thoughts were busy. It looked to him as if Black Peter were indeed in a tight corner. The snow, and men watching the river edge for tracks, made escape almost impossible.

"Say, Dad," said the young man suddenly, "what you got Bruce outside for? I thought you let him stay inside nights. It's pretty cold out tonight."

"Oh, he up and stole some bacon," said Marsh after a moment's hesitation. "I'm leaving him out to think it over. I'll let him in when I bunk down."

"Stayin' up pretty late, seems to me, Dad, ain't you?"

"I—er—I'm going to look over my traps," said Marsh quickly. "The river's freezing, and it's time."

"Say, that's so!" cried the young man suddenly. "You'll be crossin' by tomorrow if she keeps on freezin'. Maybe you'd better put it off for—oh, shucks, we can tell your tracks safe enough on account of the dog being with you—so go ahead, but watch out for Peter!"

A moment later the young man departed. In the door he paused for an instant, and a teasing smile twisted his lips.

"Say, don't let Bruce see Peter," he said. "We're aimin' to get him alive if we can."

AFTER the young man had gone there was a long silence, broken only by the whimper of Bruce begging to be let in. At last a low laugh came from the dark room beyond the kitchen.

"Locked in, eh?" said the harsh voice. "Wait 'til the river freezes, and I'll show them! That little visit sure meant luck for me, old man, but it was a poor deal for you! I'm glad I didn't bump off that fool dog!"

For several minutes Marsh considered these words, and then icy fingers of dread suddenly closed about his heart. Black Peter's plan was very evident. He would cross the river instead of Marsh, forcing the dog to go with him in some way. His tracks would easily deceive those expecting Marsh to cross the river, but they might follow back to the cabin to make sure—and then what?

Marsh knew Peter's reputation too well to be long in finding an answer to this last question—there could be but one answer. He gave a shudder and turned pale.

For a long time the old man stared at the flame of the lantern. Cold sweat broke out upon his forehead and his mouth grew dry. Life seemed very sweet to him. He had the feeling that he was in the grip of a horrible dream from which he must awaken, but the sound of Black Peter's voice made him realize that it was not a dream.

"Let her snow!" the voice laughed harshly. "Let her snow!"

All that night the old man sat staring with dazed eyes at the flame of the lantern. Now and then a chuckle came from the man in the other room; a gloating, beast-like sound that caused a faint feeling in the pit of the listener's stomach.

"Get a move on you, old man, and rustle more grub—I've got work for you to do," snarled Black Peter as daylight flickered through the little kitchen window.

Marsh, like a man in a trance, put fresh wood in the stove and pumped water for coffee. The pump was in one corner of the kitchen. Outside, the ground was white with snow, although none was falling now. The weather had grown much colder.

"She's freezin' fast now," gloated the big man after thrusting his head cautiously from the door, an act that caused Bruce, who had been shivering on the steps, to retreat to the wood-pile with a frightened bark.

"Glad I didn't kill the purp," muttered Peter. "I'll need him to help make tracks."

He reached about the little kitchen and found a length of rope.

"Here, old man, go tie that purp to the bottom step," he ordered sharply. "It's the only way I can get him to follow me—drag him."

Marsh, on numb legs, went out and coaxed Bruce to him. He tied the rope about the dog's collarless neck and fastened the other end to a post that helped support the steps. The task finished to Peter's liking, Marsh hesitated for an instant and cast a longing glance toward the shelter of the timber not over two-hundred feet away.

"Try it if you want to," chuckled the man in the doorway, the rifle resting lightly on his arm.

With a sick feeling Marsh unsteadily mounted the steps and entered the little kitchen.

After breakfast Peter strolled restlessly about the other room and scowled at the floor. At last he called to Marsh.

"How much space is there between these planks and the ground beneath?" he asked as Marsh entered the room.

"About a foot and a half," Marsh answered slowly.

"Fine!" cried Peter. "Get something to pry with."

Black Peter sat on the edge of the bunk while Marsh worked at the heavy planks. Marsh realized that he was making the opening to what was to be his own grave. He worked slowly, a mist before his eyes and his mind in a daze, but at last the task was finished. With faltering steps he returned to the little kitchen.

"It's getting cold here, old man," grunted Peter. "Better get some more wood."

Marsh noted the wood-box was empty and that the dishes needed washing. He moved slowly to the door.

"Remember I'm watching you," warned the big man, taking a position just inside the door. "I'm pretty good on running shots."

Marsh paused at the bottom of the steps to pat the head of the shivering dog. For an instant his eyes filled, and then he hastened on to the wood-pile. Brushing the snow from one end of the pile he filled his arms and returned.

"One more armful will be enough," growled the man with the rifle. "I ain't aiming on hanging around here much longer than I have to—you might have more company callin' on you."

Marsh turned back to the door again. On the top step he paused for a moment. For an instant he was tempted to make a sudden break for liberty, but his better judgment told him it would be throwing his life away. Marsh, in spite of his timid exterior, had a little glow of courage that made him scorn being shot in the back like a running rabbit. He straightened his shoulders slightly with the determination that he would not throw his cards away until the game was finished. At the same instant his gaze rested on the little frozen brook and a quick gleam of hope flashed in his eyes.

"Well, don't stand there all day!" snapped Peter. "That door lets in a heap of cold!"

AS HE spoke the big man moved away from the open door and stood where he could watch Marsh from the window. Marsh noted this new position with a shrewd glance, and going down the steps he brushed them free from their covering of dry snow with a few swift motions of his moccasined feet. On his return a stick of wood slipped from his arms and fell beside the steps. He did not go back after it.

With the closing of the kitchen door Black Peter left his position beside the window and returned to the other room to examine again the space beneath the floor. Marsh watched him eagerly and then went carelessly to the pump. With quick fingers he removed the bolt that connected the handle with the plunger-rod and slipped it into his pocket. He then reached inside a near-by cupboard and brought forth a broken bolt and put in its place. His face was pale.

A moment later the man in the other room heard a loud clatter of the pump handle and a curse from Marsh.

"What's going on?" he snapped, leaping into the kitchen with the rifle half-raised.

"The bolt was almost wore through—and up and busted," explained Marsh, rubbing an apparently bruised hand. "I'll get a pail of water from the brook to wash dishes."

The big man nodded with a scowl and again took his position beside the window.

Marsh chopped a hole in the ice of the brook and filled a pail brimming full with the cold water. Going up the steps he stumbled slightly and spilled a large portion of it. As he closed the door he glanced sharply at the cord used to hold it shut from without.

This cord, in use, was twisted about a nail outside. It was intended merely to hold the door tight. Inside, the door was held by means of a heavy stone shoved against the bottom. Marsh had long planned on making a latch but had never "got around to it."

Doubtless that was why the door was open when he returned from Jackson Flat, the old man decided; Black Peter had not noticed the stone inside. His glance at the cord outside had told Marsh that it would never hold the door shut long enough for him to make a dash for cover, but it might hold long enough for the plan he now had in mind.

About an hour later Marsh found that he would have to go for another pail of water in order to prepare the noon meal—he had been lavish in the use of water for washing dishes. Peter again took his position at the window and Marsh stepped cautiously down the steps which were slippery in spots from the water he had spilled the other time. On his return he slopped considerable more water on the steps.

After the noon meal Black Peter leaned back in his chair with a brutal laugh.

"It'll soon be time for crossing the river, old man," he said meaningly. "I guess I'd better be packing."

"Do you mean to—to bump me off when you go?" asked Marsh in a choked voice.

"I ain't taking any chances on leaving you to tell tales," grinned the other. "When they spot tracks that look like yours they will hot-foot it right back here to make sure. If you ain't here they'll feel easy-like about them tracks."

"But it's cold blooded murder!" choked Marsh.

"That's what they're after me for," grinned the big man.

Marsh said nothing more. A few minutes later Black Peter entered the other room and jerked the blanket's from the old man's bunk and commenced to pack.

Marsh glanced toward the kitchen door and nervously moistened his dry lips. Well he knew that the door would not open without a warning squeek. All depended on speed.

He moved slowly toward the door. His foot touched the stone and his eyes suddenly flashed. The next instant he was outside, the door slammed shut behind him. In a flash he twisted the cord about the nail and leaped beneath the steps—his fingers closing upon the stick of wood he had dropped from his arms some time before.

Above him he heard the pound of heavy shoes and then the sound of the door being jerked against the strength of the cord. At the second jerk the frail cord parted and Black Peter leaped out with a loud curse.

As Black Peter's feet struck the steps there was a crash and the sharp report of a rifle. A shrill, frightened yelp came from Bruce as the big man sprawled on his face beside him.

Although stunned by the fall the big

man struggled to his feet, but not quite in time. The stick of wood in the old man's hand descended upon his head before he could straighten his knees.

This time Black Peter crashed down full upon the frightened dog. Frightened to desperation, the dog snapped madly about him, slashing a huge gash in the big man's bearded face and sinking his teeth deep into his shoulder; then seeming to realize that the unconscious man could do him no harm he crawled, whimpering, to the trembling Marsh.

"BY GOLLY, boys!" cried old Jackson to the group about the hot stove. "We've got to call a halt in teasing Dad about his dog!"

"How's that?" inquired a young man who had just entered.

"Didn't Dad tell you, Bob?" asked Jackson.

"I ain't seen Dad," was the reply. "I ain't heard any of the details yet. All I know is that Dad lammed Black Peter over the head with a club."

"Well, well!" exclaimed the old storekeeper. "Dad was cookin' dinner when this here Black Peter busted in on him. Old Dad made a grab for his rifle, but Peter closed in on him and took it away. Just then the dog comes in, an' seein' the situation, closes in on Peter, slashin' open his face with the first leap."

"Some slash, too!" broke in one of the listeners. "He looked as if he'd started a rough-an'-tumble in a coon barber shop!"

"Well," went on Jackson, "Peter makes a sweep an' knocks the dog into a corner, at the same time tryin' to get Dad's rifle into action. The dog's right on the job! He leaps for Peter's throat again—missing and getting a shoulder. That gives Dad time to get into action, and he slams Peter over the head with a slab of wood. That dog sure saved Dad's life!"

"Say boys," shouted the young man, "that sure lets Dad out for any more teasing about his dog! We ought to square up with the old boy in some way. Let's take up a collection and send away and get his dog a swell collar—it'll tickle Dad almost to death!"

There followed a general shout of satisfaction and every man's hand went to his pocket.

THOSE PAWNEE SCOUTS

by Edward L. Sabin

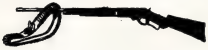
IN THE sixties Major (then First Lieutenant) Frank J. North of the Pawnee Reservation was authorized to raise a company of the Pawnees for scouting service on the plains against the Sioux and Cheyennes. Eventually a battalion was formed, each company under a chief and all under the white commander.

An earnest effort was made to drill and discipline the scouts; and they really performed simple evolutions very well. As fighters of their hereditary foes they were whirlwinds. Further to impress upon them their rôle of soldiers, they were issued uniforms—obsolete Civil War black hats, blouses, and the old sky-blue trousers.

Upon the first march thereafter a sight for gods and men was presented. The square felt hats had been transferred to the ponies' heads, with the ponies' ears sticking up through holes. The blouses were worn like short mantles, with the arms tied about the braves' necks, or else had been discarded in favor of naked hide. And the entire seats of the pants had been cut out, so that the two sections were retained merely by the belt at the waist.

In the first charge away went the hats, away sailed the blouses, the seatless pants drifted behind and the plain was strewn with garments while the yelling Pawnees rode stripped for action—stripped to breechclout and moccasins.

There were no flies on them, either.



CAT-O'-MOUNTAIN

A FOUR-PART STORY
CONCLUSION

by Arthur O. Friel

Author of "Tupahn—The Thunderstorm," "Tiger River," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

AT THE northern end of the Shawangunk Range lies a region where the Maker of Mountains went mad. It was named The Traps by the early settlers, and it is still called The Traps by the people who still occupy that desolate region.

There all strangers are looked upon with suspicion. Douglas Hampton, a newspaper man from the big city, found that no exception was made in his case.

One night the scream of a panther was followed by the cry of a frightened woman. Hampton's two-barreled shotgun eliminated the panther, and he found that the girl, Marion Oaks—"Nigger Nat's girl"—had sprained her ankle, making it impossible for her to reach home that night. Hampton doctored the ankle and watched over her for the remainder of the night in a near-by cave.

The following morning a young Trapsman named Steve came to the cave. He had escaped from the penitentiary and seemed to live only that he might be revenged upon "Snake" Sanders.

When Marion left to take Steve to a safe hiding-place she advised Hampton to make Jake Dalton's place his headquarters.

"Jake got kilt last Spring by something," she said. "You'll be safe there if Jake's ha'nt don't get you."

After Marion and Steve had left him Hampton felt a premonition of evil and, taking a small mirror from his pocket held it so that it reflected the brush behind him. Soon he saw the head of a villainous appearing man rise above the rocks. Then a box appeared and a dirty hand lifted the lid. A large copperhead crawled out and toward Hampton; then it stopped—basking sluggishly in the sun.

A few minutes later Snake openly accosted Hampton, and thinking Hampton a detective, offered to put him on the trail of any one he might be after.

Snake's attitude angered Hampton, and the two came to blows.

A hard, bloody fight ensued, the issue of which was for a long time in doubt, but Hampton was the one to walk triumphantly away.

On his way to Jake Dalton's place, Hampton passed a dingy house. Three vicious dogs rushed out, and their threats were backed up by a man—his brown face of a distinctly negro cast—who, sickle in hand, came forward on the run.

Just as things looked bad for Hampton an old man drove up, and with his help, Hampton was able to defeat the dogs and their master—Nigger Nat.

Then Hampton climbed into the buggy, and the two men drove off.

When they came to Jake Dalton's place, the old man—Uncle Eb—tried to persuade Hampton not to stay there. Seeing that his protestations were in vain, he promised to bring Hampton provisions.

"I'll git jest what I'd buy for myself. Then if—if ye ain't here to-morrer, I can use it to home."

That night Jake Dalton's ha'nt lived up to its reputation; but Hampton was tired and he soon fell asleep. All at once, he found himself staring wide-eyed into the dark. Something moved. The bed was quivering slightly. Up in the attic there was a sound like that of bare heels going across the boards. Then *it* began to come down-stairs.

Very quietly Hampton lighted his lamp, gripped his gun and rose from the bed.

With a swift grab he turned the knob and opened the door. The stairway was utterly empty!

The next day Hampton was accosted by Lou, Snake Sanders' woman. She told him the legend of Ninety-Nine's silver mine.

"You'll find it," she said, "wher' the sun hits the wall fust into the morning."

At the advice of David McCafferty, Hampton went to Uncle Eb's house. The old man was being baited by two detectives who were hunting for Steve.

Hampton bluffed the two men, Bill and Ward, and helped Steve to escape from his hiding-place.

When, later, the detectives molested Marion Oaks, intending to put her through the third degree, Hampton again interfered and knocked Bill down.

Marion's attitude to Hampton was decidedly cool and she refused to enter Uncle Eb's house with him, preferring to wait outside for Steve.

Before joining Marion, who was going to take him to her secret cave, Steve told Hampton how Snake Sanders had framed him; making it appear that he, Steve, had killed a man.

With the passing days the Trapmen ceased to regard Hampton suspiciously and he went his way

"Cat-o'-Mountain," copyright, 1923, by Arthur O. Friel.

unchallenged. Marion still avoided him and he decided to search for Ninety-Nine's silver mine.

Before setting out on his search, however, he fixed *up* some burlap bags on Jake Dalton's bed which in a dim light, would resemble a blanketed form.

Dusk found him high up on the Wall.

At the same hour a form slipped out from the trees backing Dalton's house. It slid a piece of paper under the door. Then it ran away.

On the paper was written—

"For gord Sakes don't Sleep hear to Nite."

AS HAMPTON was returning to his house on the following morning after a night in the hills, he was hailed by Eliza Oaks. Nigger Nat, she told him, had mysteriously disappeared.

Coming to his own house he discovered a corn hook buried to the hilt in the burlap dummy. It was Nigger Nat's corn hook.

Hampton at once set out in search of the would-be murderer and, meeting the two detectives, enlisted their aid.

The days passed. The advance guard of Winter had its grip on the Traps, and Steve, a fugitive from justice, poorly nourished and ill-clad, contracted pleurisy. Marion, having smoothed out her differences with Hampton appealed to him for aid, and Hampton urged Steve to live with him in Jake Dalton's house. But:

"I live free," said Steve. "Mebbe I die—but I die free—not like a rat into a house-wall."

Marion, hearing of the attempt to murder Hampton insisted that he take Spit—one of her cats—to live with him.

Several days later the two detectives discovered the body of Nigger Nat in the thicket near to Jake's house. There were no signs of foul play, but Nigger Nat's face was distorted with fear.

"The ha'nt got him," exclaimed Uncle Eb, "jest like it did Jake Dalton."

That night Hampton saw the ha'nt.

In the outer room something was struggling. Something was making a low, ghastly, unhuman noise.

Lighting his lamp, Hampton looked and stared in unbelief.

Though merged together the ha'nt contained three separate parts: Cat—rat—rattlesnake. The snake had killed the rat, had begun to swallow its prey, and had been pounced upon by Spit.

The rat was so old it would move clumsily. In a silent house its feet would have thumped. Nothing queer about that. But the snake—well grown though it was—had no rattles!

The next few days Hampton spent his time looking for Ninety-Nine's silver mine—and Nigger Nat.

The first he found in a gloomy cavern. He examined one of the silvery bars piled up in the corner and then—laughed heartily.

Marion Oaks came to the Dalton place that night.

"Snake Sanders has kilt his woman," she cried. "Every gun in The Traps is out after Snake, 'cepting yours and mine."

"My job's guarding you tonight," said Hampton. "And so——"

He did not finish the sentence.

Snake Sanders, shotgun leveled at his hip, evil face aflame, entered the room.

CHAPTER XXVII

TRAPPED

SWIFT and sudden as was the appearance of that murderous figure, it was little quicker than the movements of Douglas and Marion.

For one fleeting second the pair stood as if petrified. For the same time Snake halted as if blinded. Coming from the outer dark, he had sprung straight into the brightest beam of the gas lamp, which happened to be centered on the doorway. The shock to his optic nerves was too great to be overcome at once even by the instinctive narrowing of his lids. He wavered aside, trying to dodge the sight-searing ray without taking his gaze from the man he hated and the girl he coveted.

Simultaneously the trapped pair leaped.

Douglas lunged toward his own gun—and tripped over the forgotten low chair. Marion sprang between him and the menacing muzzles which jerked to cover him anew.

"Don't you!" she screamed. "Don't you dast shoot!"

The clatter of the overturned chair and the thump of a solid blow terminated her words. Douglas, unable to regain his balance, had pitched headlong against the stove. The impact dazed him. He fumbled, strove to rise on legs that seemed useless.

Snake's venomous face split in a lethal grin. With a hissing laugh he side-stepped, jumped forward, snapped the gun-stock to his shoulder.

Crash!

Buckshot cannoned toward the groggy man reeling up from the floor.

But the frightful charge of leaden death missed. With the muzzle less than six feet from its victim—it missed. It smashed through a window. The bellowing shock of the discharge roared out into the silent night, reverberating far along the crag-girt Traps.

Marion had leaped again. With the lightning speed of a maddened catamount she had struck at the gun, knocking it aside just as the hammer fell. Now she was gripping the twin barrels in both her strong young hands, wrenching and yanking in a furious effort to wrest the weapon from its owner.

"Leggo!" snarled Snake. "Leggo, ye red cat!"

"I won't—I got you now—Douglas! Git him!"

She strained in frenzy, jerking, twisting—but ever keeping the muzzles pointed upward.

Stunned anew by the concussion so near his head, Douglas did not hear her panted command. Nor did his numbed brain turn him of his own accord toward his shotgun. Though he had carried that weapon habitually of late, he was not a born gun-fighter; and now, in his foggy condition, he acted only by primitive instinct. But he was acting. He had regained his feet, seizing the upturned chair as he rose; and now he was lurching forward, poising the chair for a crushing down-blow.

With a louder snarl Snake heaved himself backward, dodging away from the oncoming menace and swinging up his gun with all his power, striving to break the girl's hold. But she hung on. Lifted clear of the floor, still she hung on. And Douglas, his senses quickening every instant, pressed in faster and harder.

"Got you!" Marion gasped. "Right into the house—where you—kilt my pop——"

Smash!

Glass shattered. Through the side-window licked a length of dull steel. Douglas almost collided with it. He halted. It was another gun-barrel. And it covered Snake and Marion.

"Marry!" crackled a harsh voice. "Git 'way! He's mine!"

Behind the cocked hammers of the gun glimmered a white face: a drawn, haggard face dominated by hollow eyes in which gleamed cold ferocity.

"Git 'way! Git back! Leggo' that 'ere gun! I'm a-shootin'!" came the ice-edged voice again.

But the commands ended in a cough, followed by a choked moan of pain. The muzzles wavered. Then they steadied again.

That voice, that face, that gun, seemed to freeze Snake. Fear shot athwart his contorted visage. His arms turned limp. Marion, feet again on the floor, hands still desperately clutching the steel, flashed a glance at the window, another at Snake—and tore the gun from his relaxing fingers. An instant too late he snatched for it. It was gone from him, and its muzzles—one impotent, but the other deadly—were four feet away, yawning at his face.

"Good gal!" A freezing chuckle sounded at the shattered frame. "Don't ye kill him less'n he jumps—he's mine! I got to talk to him a minute 'r so, an' then— Hamp, shove up the winder! I'm a-comin' in."

"Can't, Steve," Douglas replied mechanically. "Never could get this sash up. It's warped solid. Come around."

The fierce face hung in the dimness a moment longer before it moved. Then, reluctantly:

"Awright, if I gotta I gotta. But ye watch him close! He's a snake—if he moves bust him!"

As the barrel withdrew Snake darted desperate glances at the pair. He saw a tense, ready girl, flame-haired, flame-eyed, holding him at bay like an angel of vengeance; a grim-jawed man who once before had knocked him senseless, who had been relentlessly trailing him for many days, who now stood alert and all too eager to avenge three attempts on his life. But if he could only dodge that one barrel and dive through the window——

"Don't try it!" the hard voice of Hammerless Hampton warned. "If she should miss you I wouldn't! I'm only holding off because you're Steve's meat. Make one little move and——"

The threat of the hovering chair was all too plain.

Snake licked his thin lips, shot a look doorward—then shrank back as if trying to merge himself with the unyielding wall. A moment ago he had plumbed the hot eyes of Wrath. Now he looked into the stony countenance of Revenge.

Steve was in the room. Steve, born like a wolf, wild as a wolf, now was merciless as a wolf. Through his matted black hair his cavernous eyes glared in concentrated hate; across his bristle-bearded mouth stretched a fang-toothed grin; in his creeping step was the stiffness of a timber-wolf about to leap and rend. At his hip hung the battered double-gun of dead Nigger Nat, hammers back like the heads of striking serpents, triggers tense under wasted fingers, muzzles slipping with nerve-shattering slowness toward the vitals of the cornered betrayer and murderer. So appalling was the utter ferocity of that shambling figure that Marion's face paled and her weapon sank, while even Douglas felt ice crawl down his spine.

"Three year!" the avenger rasped through his teeth. "Three year I done for ye! I'd 'a' died, only I swored I'd git ye, Snake—I'd git ye 'spite o' bars an' walls an' guards an' all ——! An' now's yer time to pay! Ye're gone!"

Snake's face writhed again. Desperately he strove to avert his doom.

"Steve, ye're wrong! I tried to git ye clear——"

"Shet up! Ye dirty liar! Ye——"

"But wait, for Gawd's sakes! Gimme a chance to tell ye! Ye was drunk that night—ye was wild—crazy—I couldn't handle ye. Ye got 'way from me. Fust I knowed, the place was a-burnin' an' ye a-shootin'—I resked my own life a-tryin' to git ye 'way—don't ye mind me a-haulin' ye down the road an' the Bumps a-shootin' after us an' how ye tumbled sudden? I thought they'd hit ye, kilt ye, an' I had to look out for myself then. Mebbe ye don't 'member—ye was so drunk——"

"Ye lie! I was drunk—ye got me drunk a-purpose—but I can 'member better'n ye think I can. Drinkin' never makes me crazy: it makes me sleepy: but a thing that happens when I'm drunk stays clear into my head when I'm sober agin. Ye can't wiggle out, ye p'ison varmint! I'm a-shootin' right quick. But fust ye got to tell me how ye kilt Nat. Wha'd ye do to him? Speak up, blast ye!"

"I never!" Snake's voice rose to a scream. "I never! Last I see o' Nat that night he was a-trompin' round the road crazy drunk. I was Nat's friend—I been your friend—I'm here now 'cause I'm friends with all the Oakses! Lookit that feller Hampton! He's yer wust enemy! He set the 'tectives onto ye—he told Marry into this 'ere house tonight—he's a-gittin' her 'way from ye—he'd doin' ye dirt to very turn!"

The desperate play to distract Steve's attention almost succeeded. It was a diabolical stroke at the hard-bitten youth's innate distrust of outsiders and at his jealousy. So unexpected was it that for an instant Douglas and Marion stood staring blankly; and Steve, brain aflame, nearly turned to confront them. Had he done so, Snake could have jumped, shoved him toward Marion, and sprung out of the door before either of the guns—or the chair, which Douglas had lowered—could stop him.

But he did not quite succeed. Steve's eyes turned, but the deadly muzzles did not swing more than an inch. Then, just as a sinuous quiver of forthcoming action ran through Snake, eyes and muzzles darted back at him. Simultaneously Douglas stepped forward with fists clenched and Marion with gun lifted.

"Hold up a minute, Steve," Douglas requested ominously. "I owe him one for that. You, Snake! Step out and put up your hands!"

"Don't you!" the girl rebuked him. "He's a-tryin' a trick! Steve, it's all lies! I've got a good mind to kill him my own self. But I ain't a-goin' to, and don't you shoot him neither. What good will it do to——"

"I been waitin' three year! What ye think—I'll let him loose now?"

A harsh cackle followed—ending in another of those involuntary moans. Steve lurched slightly. His face drew even tighter.

"Keep off, the both o' ye!" he gasped.

"Make him tell the truth!" Douglas shot back. "Give him to the officers—they'll get the truth out of him—the truth that will clear you! Don't you see? You won't have to hide any more then. You'll never have to go back to the pen. And he'll get what's coming to him for murdering Lou. If you shoot him he never can clear you—the law will be after you all your life! Are you going to kill your own chances? Don't be a fool!"

His rapid counsel stayed Steve's fingers even as they tightened on the triggers. So set on personal and deadly vengeance had the youth been that the thought of making his betrayer rehabilitate him with the Law had never occurred to him. Even now the idea made but slow headway against his fixed mania for revenge. But he held his fire, letting the dazzling possibility grow in his mind.

"That's what I was tryin' to tell you, Steve," seconded Marion. "He can't talk if you kill him! Now you git away—we'll give him to the detectives—you git back to the cave and stay there till we tell you to come out——"

Snake broke in. He had been squinting wildly at Douglas.

"Lou? Ye say I kilt Lou? I never! She—she fell offen the Wall—I didn't have nothin' to do with it—she got dizzy——"

All at once his eyes widened, looking beyond them. Douglas half-turned, then forced his gaze back, suspecting a trick.

But it was no ruse. Quiet footsteps sounded at the rear of the room. Then spoke a cool, authoritative voice:

"Stand still, everybody. Don't try anything sudden. We'll take charge of this thing now."

Three heads jerked around. Snake still stared. From the obscurity of Douglas' sleeping-room had issued two men who now advanced watchfully, right hands under their coats. They were Ward and Bill.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AN ACCOUNT IS CLOSED

FROM the surprize of seeing those dreaded detectives two men recovered quickest—Douglas, who had no fear of them; and Snake, who had every fear of them.

Marion and Steve seemed frozen. Their guns had swerved from Snake's body. The door still stood open, and between officers and criminal stood three people. Snake broke for freedom.

But Douglas had thought of that. Hardly had he glimpsed the officers when he swung back. At Snake's first move he sprang.

Snake reached the doorway. But he went no farther. With the all-concealing darkness before his eyes—something struck him. An arm swooped under his jaw, yanking fiercely back on his throat. A knee smote the small of his back, numbing his legs. A savage fist crashed under his right ear. He collapsed.

Still holding his throat-lock, Douglas dragged him back to the middle of the room and flung him down with a thud that jarred the whole house.

"Here he is," he said curtly. "Now grill him."

"Good eye, Hampton," Ward approved, smiling grimly. "We couldn't git to him with these kids in the way. Guess you got a whole lot of satisfaction out of that wallop, huh?"

"A whole lot!" Douglas nodded, opening and shutting his right fist. "Now you—Steve! Quit that!"

The refugee, his wolfish teeth bared, was slowly backing doorward, his gun now covering the hated trailers.

"Yeah!" snarled Bill, reaching backward again. "Put that gun down and freeze right where y'are! We wantcha, my fine boid!"

"Ye ain't got me," came the hoarse answer. "An' ye don't git me! Ye pull that gun o' yourn an' ye won't never shoot! I got ye cold!"

It was deadly truth, and Bill knew it. One twitch of the fingers, and he would be a riddled corpse. But he was brave enough. With his long-sought quarry at last before him, he did not shrink from the cold muzzles as he once had from the hammerless gun in Marion's hands, up the road.

"Ya got one chanst," he growled. "Put that gun down and wait while we sweat this guy. If he comes acrost ya'll be free. If ya shoot I'll git ya before I hit the floor."

"And so will I," Ward coolly added. "Show some sense! We're givin' you a square deal. Now if you're guilty as charged, try makin' your getaway. If you ain't, stick around. This guy here is goin' to talk."

Marion also, who had been tensely watching the pair, turned on the gaunt fugitive.

"Steve, you heard what he said," she challenged, looking him straight in the eyes. "If you shoot or run it'll show you *did* burn out the Bumps! I want to know my own self whether you did or not. You better stay here."

Through a silent pause Steve stood slit-eyed, studying his foes: the men who had hounded him so long, and the one who had caused that hounding. Snake was reviving. He was staring blankly upward. On him the hunted youth's gaze fixed. Slowly he let his weapon sink.

"Ye keep offen me," he warned. "I ain't a-runnin'. But I'm a-keepin' my gun. I'm a-stayin' right where I be. Don't ye come nigh me!"

"That's good enough," consented Ward, after a shrewd look. "You stay right there. Now everybody shut up. I want to talk to this guy Sanders."

In an undertone, however, he said to Douglas:

"Kid looks sick and off his nut. Is he?"

"Sick, yes. Lungs. May be pneumonia," was the muttered reply.

Ward frowned. Then he snapped at Snake.

"You, Sanders! Git up and talk turkey! We've got you dead to rights. No lies, now!"

Snake, sitting up, dizzily eyed each hard face.

"Wha—wha'd ye want?" he muttered thickly.

"Stand up! Back against that wall! Come on, move! And don't pull any gay stuff. You got some explainin' to do, and the less wigglin' and dodgin' you try the better off you'll be. Understand?"

Snake got up, looking confused. The other three also glanced in a puzzled way at the officers. Here was a murderer, condemned by the revelations of the woman whom he had hurled to her doom; why did they not drag him out forthwith? They acted as if they only meant to question him, and then, perhaps, let him go.

But Douglas felt that Ward, the man-hunter, knew what he was about, and said nothing. Marion and Steve, too, kept silence. Sanders slouched against the blank inner-wall designated by Ward.

"Now git this in your head, first off," Ward said crisply. "We've been in here quite a while. We've been learnin' a lot—about *you*. It'll do you no good to try any lyin'. You come clean, and you may save a lot of trouble all around. Know what I mean?"

Snake nodded dubiously, but with hope beginning to glimmer in his shifting eyes. Douglas saw light. This assumption of omniscience and of infallibility in detecting falsehood, this intimation that full confession would benefit the prisoner—these were part of the stock-in-trade of policedom, as the ex-newspaperman well knew. They formed both a wordless threat and an unexpressed promise: absolutely non-committal, yet subtly potent.

"Well, then, what about this lad? Did he do that burnin' and shootin', or did you? Remember he's right here, listenin' to what you say. Bill, move over a little. Sanders, you look the kid right in the eye. Now then! What about it?"

As Bill, hovering ready at Sanders' left, drew back, Snake turned unwillingly and looked at Steve. The youth made no movement, spoke no word; but his glittering eyes bored into Snake's inmost being. Under that baleful glare, under the chill scrutiny of four other pairs of eyes, the yellow soul of Sanders shriveled. He quailed visibly. Shifting his gaze, he encountered again the piercing orbs of Ward.

"I—done—it," he whispered.

"You did," Ward repeated clearly. "All right. That's the stuff, Sanders, tell it straight. Now just tell the whole thing—why you did it and how you did it and all the rest of it. You'll feel better then, maybe. Come on, spill it all."

Snake boggled over the start; but with a little more brisk urging by Ward, whose manner was as matter-of-fact as if the crime were nothing more serious than hunting out of season, he began a hang-dog recital. Ward, reaching into an inner pocket, quietly stepped behind Douglas. The latter felt a notebook being pressed against his back, followed by the quiver of a rapidly moving pencil. Unseen by Snake, whose eyes rested on the floor, the whole story was being recorded.

Shorn of twists and turns and blundering attempts to show justification for the attack on the Bumps, the confession corroborated the tale told by Steve that afternoon in Uncle Eb's kitchen. Snake asserted that the Bump crowd had cheated him in a berry-picking deal, stolen some of his "pick" outright, assaulted him when he demanded his due; all of which perhaps was true. He denied having plied Steve with liquor in order to make him a scapegoat, but admitted having deserted him after the commission of the crime. And, so far as the crime itself was concerned, he cleared Steve absolutely.

When his stumbling narrative was concluded, Ward gave him no rest. Whether or not confession be good for the soul, man-hunters know that it is good for the ends of justice to keep a criminal talking when once he has started. Wherefore he briskly asserted:

"That's good, Sanders, that's fine. Now tell us what happened to Nat Oaks. You were with him. Come on, open up."

"I—I—I dunno. I warn't into this house with him."

"Not in the house? Outside, though. Sure. Out in the yard, now? You saw him come out, anyway. What did he do?"

Snake wriggled; glanced around; licked his lips again; looked cornerwise into Ward's eyes.

"Wal—uh—I tell ye. Nat, he was crazy drunk. He come down here to—to git Hampton. He was p'ison mad 'bout them dawgs that Hampton kilt. I come with him—I was tryin' to git him to go home—I didn't want no——"

"Never mind that stuff. What did he do?"

"He—uh—he snuck in by hisself. I was out into the road. He was into the house—all to oncet he give a yell an' he come a-runnin'. He never said nawthin'—he was a-fussin', like, into his throat, a-groanin' an' a-grumblin'—an awful kind of a noise! He come a-tearin' right by me an' went *kersmash* into the bresh, an' I hearn him a-thrashin' round into the dark, an' then I didn't hear him no more. An' I was scairt—I run right up the road an' put for home. That's Gawd's truth, fellers. I dunno what got him—'less'n 'twas Jake's ha'nt."

His head was up now, and he looked into the faces of the others as if telling the truth—or part of the truth. Ward regarded him silently, perhaps deciding to let the Oaks matter rest. Then Douglas shot a sudden question.

"What did you have against Jake?"

Snake's jaw dropped. He stared as if a ghost had risen from the floor. Bill and Ward looked mystified, but watched him keenly. From Steve sounded a low grunt, as if he partly understood and wholly approved the question. Marion, a rapt witness of the proceedings, stood awaiting the answer though not comprehending the purport of the demand.

"I—uh—me an' Jake—we didn't have no trouble," stuttered Snake. "What ye mean? We was good friends——"

"Ye lie!" broke in Steve. "Ye said Jake stole yer licker, an' if he done it agin ye'd git him! I hearn ye an' Jake a-rowin' 'bout it one time up into the rocks—'fore I got sent away. Ye told him if he stole 'nother jug o' yourn he'd find snakes into it!"

"Aha!" Douglas pounced on the revelation. "And he did steal another, eh? Did he? Quick, now!"

The vicious face reddened with quick anger.

"Yas, he did! He done it more'n oncet—the fat hawg-bellied fool! He'd steal every time he got a chance. He was too lousy lazy to make his own——"

"And so you chopped off a rattler's rattle and put the snake in here! Didn't you? Hurry up!"

"Yas, I did, ye smart Aleck! What of it? Puttin' a snake into a house ain't killin' nobody. I only done it to scare him."

"So? A fine way to scare a man—cutting off those rattles! You'll be saying next that you only meant to scare me awhile ago when you shot at me on the floor. You only intended to scare me when you let that copperhead out of the box on Dickie Barre, maybe—without letting me know it was there. Of course! You know mighty well what killed Jake, and Nat too, and you've been expecting the same thing to get me here—that rattler. Now you all listen a minute while I tell you what Dalton's Death was."

And for the first time Douglas revealed the truth about the ha'nt.

"That's the only reason why you let me live here in peace," he accused. "You thought your snake would finish me as it finished Jake. When it didn't you put Nat up to stabbing me, while you stayed outside——"

"Ye can't prove nothin'!" flared Snake, eyeing him in hot hatred. "I wisht a dozen snakes had bit ye, ye meddlin' sneaker! But ye can't prove what ye said—ther' ain't a witness nowheres! An' how would I know the snake had gone to livin' into the bed? How'd I know it didn't go outen the house? I didn't make it bite Jake—I didn't know 'twas here when Nat come—ye can't prove I put Nat up to comin'—an' that shootin' jest now was a accident—my thumb slipped——"

"Lies, lies, lies!" Douglas growled. "Accident? The same kind of accident that threw Lou over the edge of the wall! But your accidents are finished now, thanks to the accident that she hit that tree and wasn't killed. All right, Ward. I'll shut up. Take him away."

Ward was scowling, as if Douglas had upset his program. But he nodded shortly and reached under his coat. His hand came away with a pair of handcuffs.

"No need of any more grillin', I guess," he said. "We've got all the proof we need about the Brackett matter, and this guy can tell his side to the judge. Stick out your hands, Sanders!"

Snake seemed paralyzed. His eyes were bulging, and he stared at Douglas as if disbelieving his ears. His mouth worked twice before words came.

"She warn't kilt?" he blurted. "She ain't dead?"

"Not yet, but soon," Ward snapped. "She's dyin', but we've got her whole story wrote down and witnessed. Didn't know that, did you? Thought the fellows around here were shootin' at you just on suspicion, hey? Nothin' to it, Sanders—you're up against it cold. You give us the double-cross once awhile ago, but we're collectin' on that little deal now. Shove out those hands before I bust you one!"

Utter desperation blanched Snake's face. His hands began to lift as if weights were dragging them down. His hunted eyes flickered all about. Suddenly he stiffened. His left hand flashed up, pointing.

"It's a lie!" he screeched. "Ther' she is—ther' by the winder! Lou! Lou! Come in an' tell 'em it's a lie!"

So real was his sudden appeal that involuntarily every man wheeled to see that imaginary figure beyond. Instantly Snake struck.

His right fist shot against Ward's neck, knocking him headlong. His left smashed into the face of Bill, who was turning back to him. Bill, too, toppled and fell—but reached for his revolver even as he dropped. Hampton, jumping at his enemy, collided with the empty wall. Snake was not there.

He was flashing across the room. At the window he stopped an instant. His hand licked out, seized Hampton's gun leaning against the wall. He spun about, half-leveled it at Hampton, jerked both triggers—got no answering explosion. The safety was on, locking the weapon against discharge. With an oath he whirled to throw himself through the window.

A sharp report cracked from the floor where Bill lay. It was drowned by a stunning crash beyond the prone officer. The house heaved with the terrific concussion. Blue smoke blurred the whole room.

Deafened, Douglas teetered on his heels, peering through the haze at a mangled huddle under the window.

Faintly to his numbed ears came a piercing yell of sated vengeance.

"I got him!" screamed Steve. "Both barrils! *Yeeeeow!*"

Then, grinning like a mad wolf, the pain-racked boy slowly crumpled to the floor and lay still.

CHAPTER XXIX

OUT OF THE PAST

THREE men straightened up and turned slowly away from a shot-riddled thing which also had been a man. Their gaze centered on another motionless form a few feet away, its thin hands still clutched around a battered old muzzle-loader. Beside that silent figure knelt an anxious-eyed girl, down whose shoulders hung disordered red hair.

"Well," said Ward in business-like tones, "this is what I call a good clean-up. The quicker a snake gits killed the better. This one's as dead as they make 'em, and the State won't have to spend a nickel on givin' him a trial and bumpin' him off. Nor it won't have to give this kid any more board and lodgin' down the river. All we've got to do now is have you folks witness that confession, and then we'll drift out and report. Sanders was shot resistin' arrest, and Bill here done the shootin'. Ain't that right, Bill?"

He winked at his burly partner. Bill grinned heavily and returned the wink.

"Yeah. That's right. Killed by Officer William Moiphy in p'formance o' dooty. I dunno if I hit him, but I shot, and he croaked, and that's good enough for the records. But what about the kid? Hadn't we oughter take him out till they fix up the red tape down below?"

"Nope," decisively. "We can fix that. Kid can't travel anyway. Might kill him. We'll leave him lay here and git better if he can. More'n that, I'm goin' to send that Brackett woman's doctor up here to tend to him. Charge the bill up to expenses. The State owes him that much, anyway. Now, sister, let's have a look at him."

As Ward stooped over the unconscious youth the girl drew back in instinctive distrust, one hand slipping toward the gun she had captured from Snake. The man gave her a look half-amused, half-warning. Douglas spoke soothingly.

"It's all right, Marion. Maybe you didn't notice what was said just now. Steve's cleared, and Ward here is going to send in a doctor. These fellows are leaving—and so am I. Steve will be well soon, and then you two can get married, and—and—everything's all right."

Despite himself, his last words sounded hollow. He turned his gaze to the wan face of the wolf-boy, somberly contemplating the sunken cheeks, the deep-rimmed eyes, all the painfully apparent ravages of privation and sickness. He did not observe the sudden amazement in the three other faces, which turned quickly to his; nor the ensuing tiny tremble of the girl's lips.

"Huh? These two git— Gee, I thought— Huh!" muttered Bill, blankly looking from boy to girl and then back at Hampton. Ward, too, stared; then, tongue in cheek, looked down again at Steve.

"Git married? Me and Steve?" breathed Marion. "And you—you're goin'——"

A moan from the floor, a shudder of the ragged body and a trembling of the hands around the gun, cut her short and drew the attention of all. The pale lips twitched; the eyes opened, steadied on Ward's face. The jaw clicked shut. Steve struggled to rise.

"All right, lad," Ward said kindly. "We don't want you. Take it easy. You're in the clear, and Sanders is croaked, and we're goin' out and leave you. Now you'd better git to bed. Hampton, want to put your blankets around him? And shut that back window of yours. We left it open——"

"That's how you got in?"

"Sure. We spotted that easy-slidin' window days ago—made a little call here and looked things over again, just for luck. I don't aim to overlook anything when I'm on a job. So tonight when we heard that cannon go off we took it on the run, looked in here and saw you had got Sanders cornered, and eased ourselves in by that window to git an earful of what you were raggin' about. It helps a lot sometimes to hear things without lettin' folks know— Huh? What's that, kid?"

Steve was trying to break in. Now he gasped:

"Leave me lay. Go look out for mom. Snake, he mauled her. He went thar—'fore he come here. I found her all——"

Marion sprang up with a cry.

"Mom? Snake hurt her?"

"Yuh—he mauled her awful. She told me—take the gun and—see if ye was here. I put her on the bed—and I come a-runnin'. She's hurt bad. Git to her."

Douglas and Bill tensed. Ward straightened with a snap.

"More dirty work!" growled Ward, with a hard look at the dead man beyond. "We'd all better git up there. Say, Miss Oaks! How about bringin' this Steve to your house? This ain't a good place for him."

"Oh, bring him, bring him! Poor mom! I'm a-goin'!"

She sped into the night. Ward moved swiftly after her.

"Bill, you and Hampton fetch him along," he commanded. And he, too, was lost in the darkness.

Hastily Douglas gathered his blankets and threw them around Steve, who doggedly strove to stand on his own legs but could not. Deprived now of the vengeful force which had sustained him so long, he was utterly without strength. But his wasted frame was no burden at all to the muscles of the two strong men aiding him. And a moment later, bundled in warm woven wool, he was being borne rapidly along the road, his tortured chest enwrapped in the bulging arms of the man who had remorselessly hunted him, his legs upheld by the tall "furriner" who had stood by him ever since his return from prison walls.

Before the three, the white beam of the gas lamp lit up the road. Behind, stiffening in the blackness of the eery house where at last he had entrapped himself, lay the creature whose venom would never more menace the dwellers in the Traps.

At the door of the Oaks house Ward met them. His face was grave.

"Put him on this here cot," he quietly directed. "I've got the fire goin' and some water on." Lowering his voice and nodding toward an inner room where an oil lamp shone feebly, he added: "She's in there. Can't do anything for her. She's all busted up inside. Hemorrhages. She won't last till daybreak."

"Talkin' any?" hoarsely whispered Bill.

"Nope. Just holdin' the girl's hand. She might say somethin' later on. We'll stick around."

They lowered Steve to a rickety sofa, opened the blanket-roll encasing him, and bared his ridge-ribbed chest. Ward tiptoed about and found mustard and cloths. Bill, clumsily anxious to do something but ignorant of how to go about it, fidgeted a moment and then appointed himself guardian of the fire. Steve, lips pressed together, lay still, moving only his eyes, which went back and forth between Douglas and the doorway of the inner room. The blond man nodded and stole to the portal.

Within, he saw two faces: one thin, dark, pillowed in a worn old bed—a face gray-white beneath its swarthiness; the other fair, rounded, but white and set, leaning close. Across the mouth of the sufferer lay a towel blotched with red stains, and from the headboard another hung ready. The black-browed eyes were closed, and across the forehead above them softly stroked gentle tapering fingers. On the shabby counterpane a work-worn old hand and a shapely young one were joined. Somewhere a cheap clock ticked as if hurrying along the last hours of the injured woman's life. That, and difficult breathing, were the only sounds.

Marion's head turned, and for a moment her grief-stricken eyes dwelt on the blue ones at the doorway. Then they returned to the face on the pillow. Douglas withdrew. In that straight look he had found confirmation of what his own gaze and Ward's laconic words had told him.

He shook his head soberly at Steve and at the other two, watching him. The boy's mouth set harder; but he said nothing. Ward went on making a hot poultice. Bill shifted his feet and awkwardly fed another stick into the stove.

"I don't quite git it," Ward mused in an undertone, as the three gathered around Steve. "What would Sanders beat her up for?"

"For the same reason that he would kill Lou Brackett and shoot at me," Douglas explained. "It all fits in together. The reason is—Marion."

"Wanted her, you mean?"

"Exactly. He couldn't have her and Lou too, so he got rid of Lou. He threw her off the Wall because that would look like an accident. A snake-bite wouldn't do, because folks would be too suspicious, especially since snakes are denning up now. Any other form of murder, too, would look bad. A fall off the Wall would be the most natural thing.

"Mrs. Oaks, here, hated Sanders, and he knew it. From what Steve tells us—that she told him to leave her and see if Marion was at my house—Sanders must have come here determined to drag the girl away to a hole in the rocks where he's been hiding lately. She probably cussed him out—maybe threatened him with the gun—and he thought Marion was here. So he jumped on her, pounded her like the murderous brute he was, searched the house, and then came to my place; saw us in there, and jumped in to finish me and grab her before she could get to my gun."

"Sounds reasonable," Ward nodded, drawing Steve's shirt together over the deftly-arranged plaster. "He sure was a hard guy. Well, there's no more to do now but wait. You git to sleep, lad, if you can. I'm goin' out for a little smoke."

He passed to the bedroom doorway, looked in, then quietly opened and closed the outer door. A minute later, outside a window, showed the flare of a match and the glow of a pipe.

Time dragged past. Steve lay silent. Bill and Douglas sat wordless. Ward returned, found some cold biscuit and butter, made a big pot of coffee, passed them around. From time to time one or another of them stepped to the door and looked in on the girl keeping her grim vigil; then tiptoed back and resumed his seat.

Hour after hour crawled along, measured only by the unfeeling tick of that cheap clock, which had no hour-bell. Steve slept. Bill dozed, sprawling in his chair. Ward and Hampton nursed empty pipes. From the room beyond came occasional choking noises, but no voice.

Then, low but penetrating, sounded a call for aid:

"Douglas! Come help me!"

In six strides Douglas was beside Marion, who was supporting the older woman's bony shoulders in her arms. The dark eyes were open now, and the red-dyed mouth was gasping for breath.

"She wants to be lifted," added the girl. "I can do it, but I might shake her. Jest raise her easy."

With a smooth lift he set Eliza against the pillows which Marion erected at her back. One glance into the ashy face and the glassy eyes told him that the end was close at hand.

For a minute or two the dying woman looked fixedly at him. She seemed gathering her strength. Her gaze went to Marion. Then it centered again on Hampton's strong, clean face.

"I'm a-goin'," she breathed. "Snake done it. Did ye—git him?"

"Steve got him," he answered. "Got him with Nat's gun. Both barrels. He owned up first, though, that Steve didn't burn out the Bumps. Steve goes free. Everything's all right. Don't talk."

A wild light filled the fixed eyes. A haggard smile crooked the thin lips.

"Steve done it! Nat's gun! That's good! Awful good!"

A sudden cough and a fresh red flow stopped her. Then, instead of drooping back, she seemed to straighten and strengthen. Her breath came short, but more easily.

"I got to talk. Don't hender me. I ain't got much time. I got to tell ye—'fore I go. Marry—ain't ourn."

Douglas started.

"Not yours? Not your daughter?"

"No. I never had no—young 'uns of my own. We got Marryin—three year old. Her pop was—a painter feller. From Noo York. Name was Dyke.

"He come into here—fourteen year ago—paint pictures. Wife had got drownded—sailboat sunk into ocean—nigh Noo York, he—told us. He was awful grievious 'bout it. Come up here to paint an'—git over it. Brought his little gal—Marryin—all he had left—little rosy gal—purty as a angel.

"We was more 'spectable then. Nat he worked—didn't drink much—hunted an' trapped—made a good livin'. Dyke wanted board with us. We let him. He went paintin'—up 'long the crick—up onto Minnewasky—diff'rent places. Little Marryin stayed here mostly—'count o' snakes—daddy was scairt she'd git—bit if she went 'long o' him.

"Dyke was good feller but—quick tempered—git fightin' mad like a shot. Him an' Nat—they had two-three spats. One time they went huntin'. Nat come home 'lone. Said Dyke fell offen Dickabar. Kilt.

"We got him outen—the rocks. Buried him out back. Nat got drinkin'—talkin' into his sleep—let out that him an' Dyke fit 'bout suthin'. Nat busted his neck. When he see what he—done, he throwed him—offen Dickabar to look like—he fell by—hisself.

" 'Course I never told. Nat he was my man. Snake Sanders, he—knowed or 'spicioned—I dunno how—but he kep' Nat scairt. Made Nat do—dirty work. But he never—told on him. Nor I wouldn't—tell ye now but—Nat he's gone—can't nobody hurt him now. I'm a-goin' too—Marry she'll be 'lone—'ceptin' for Steve an'—you. One o' ye's got to—look out for her."

She gasped, struggled up straighter, fought off the tightening clasp of Death. Her dimming eyes traveled about the blur of hovering faces. Except Steve, asleep outside, all in the house now were clustered around the bed.

"Ye—Hampton—I been mad at ye—but—ye come from outside—like Marry's pop. Marry she—b'longs outside too. Her folks was quality—she warn't borned into—Traps. She'd oughter go out.

"Steve an' her, they—growed up like brother an'—sister. They knowed they warn't—but they been the same. Steve got livin' with us—I dunno jest when—he was little feller—he jest come an' stayed. They growed—like I said. He's good boy but—he aint fitten to—take care o' Marry. Too wild—too young—he ain't got a stiddy head—ye know what I—mean. I'd go easier to know she was—took care of by—strong man that knowed things."

She strove to make out the expression on the face of the blond blur which was Hampton. She could not. But to her failing ears came a deep-toned, solemn promise:

"I will take care of her. As if she were my own sister."

Another faint smile fluttered and faded. The black head sank back wearily. Once more the stiffening lips moved:

"Marry gal—I might of—done better—by ye. I cussed ye—knocked ye round—but I kep' ye—safe. Snake nor no other—varmint never—got ye. I done the—best I—knowed how. I—I'm—a-goin'——"

A quiver ran from breast to lips. The arms went limp. The body relaxed.

Nigger Nat's woman—primitive product of harsh hills, hard-bitten, hard-spoken, unmannered and unlovely, yet loyal to the last to her man and the waifs whom she had taken to her craggy heart—had laid down the burden of life and passed on.

CHAPTER XXX

THE CALL OF THE SOUTH

BRILLIANT morning sunlight flooded the dingy kitchen-dining-living room of the Oaks house. Late though the season was, the southward-rising sun now lit up the interior more clearly than it ever had in mid-Summer; for its slanting rays, instead of sinking into green ground and foliage, now ricocheted upward from a thin earth-blanket of snow.

That snow was two days old, and the latest of three light falls which had come since the night when Snake Sanders and his last victim passed out. The other two had speedily melted, and even this one had shrunk noticeably in an ensuing thaw. But today the air was keen and the white coverlet hard.

Snow and cold, however, meant little to the eight gathered in that room. In the cheery warmth radiating from the mud-colored old stove four of them crouched or lay in the sleepy contentment of full stomachs, while the other four sat pensively on chairs or sofa. The floor-hugging contingent comprised the Oaks felines—Spit and Spat and Fit and Fat. The folks above them were Marion, Steve, Douglas, and Uncle Eb.

Beside the outer door stood two guns—one, an old, rust-pitted muzzle-loader; the other a clean, graceful hammerless—and a blanket pack, to which a smaller bundle had been lightly corded. To a contemplative eye those insensate things would have told a story of double trust: that, as the guns stood side by side, so would their owners stand shoulder to shoulder; and that the man who presently would carry that pack would bear also the light burden of a woman who had faith in him—for that small package was unmistakably a thin dress, within which probably were wrapped a few other articles of clothing.

"Wal," barked Uncle Eb, shattering a thoughtful silence, "ye might say this was the endin' an' the beginnin'. Nat an' 'Lizy an' Snake an' Lou are all into their graves, an' them detective fellers are so long gone I 'most forgot they ever was into here, an' Steve's back onto his legs, an' Marry an' Hammerless are a-goin' out. An' that's the endin'. But then ag'in, Steve's a-comin' to live 'long o' me, an' if old Ninety-Nine's mine ain't lost ag'in by nex' spring we'll see what we can make outen it; an' Marry's a-startin' into that thar art-school ye told about, Hamp; an' ye say ye're a-goin' to quit driftin' round an' git into a reg'lar business down to the city—sellin' bonds, did ye say? An' so that's the beginnin'. Now all I'm bothered 'bout is how I'm a-goin' to keep these cats to my house. They'll run right back here, I bet ye."

"When they see ther' ain't nothin' to eat here they'll come a-scootin' up the hill agin, don't worry," predicted Steve, a saturnine smile crooking his pale mouth. "Ther' won't be nobody livin' into here, 'less'n Marry gits homesick an' wants to come back. Anybody else that tries movin' in will move out agin quick's I can git to him. Marry, don't ye kind o' hate to go?"

"I—dunno," she slowly answered. "It's the onliest home I ever knowed, but—but it ain't the same now. No! I—I *couldn't* live here! Now that I know who my real daddy was, and—and I've got a chance to draw real pictures and—and *be* somebody 'sides 'Nigger Nat's girl' and 'that red-headed catamount' and all——"

She paused, her eyes shining as the misty portal of Dreams swung back and gave her a vision of what lay beyond. The three men nodded; Douglas understandingly, Uncle Eb decisively, Steve somberly.

"That's right," Douglas agreed. "You've been underground long enough, and now you must blossom out into the sun. It's your daddy's blood that has driven you to draw and dream, and he'd tell you now to go out and develop your talent. That's his heritage to you—that urge to draw—and you owe it to him to make something of it. It means work, but it's worth while."

"Oh, I can work—won't I work, though! And—and some day I'm comin' back up here and draw that hole in the crick that's bothered me so long—and paint it, too—and make it right!"

Her slender fingers closed and her cheeks flushed in joyous enthusiasm. Steve eyed her soberly, then nodded again.

"Yas, tha's right, I reckon," he sighed. "It's a-goin' to be awful lonesome 'thout ye, Marry gal, but mebbe ye won't forgit us. I—I——"

He stopped abruptly and gulped.

"Why—why, Stevie!"

She sprang up and stroked his hair.

"I won't never forgit you, never! You've always been good to me—stood up for me like a real brother many's the time—it 'most broke my heart when they sent you away. And when the noo-mony got you jest lately I——"

"Don't say no more," he broke in huskily. "Ye've stood up for me too, an' ye pulled me through that noo-mony, an' I couldn't ask no more. But I got to tell ye, Marry—I ain't 'shamed to say it right out front of everybody—I got thinkin' mebbe sometime we might—might git married, all reg'lar, with a ring an' everythin'. I hadn't no right to, but I couldn't help it. But then I see it warn't no use. I done a lot o' thinkin', up thar into my hole into the ground, an' I could see plain ye was 'way over my head."

His teeth set, and the hard lines around his mouth deepened. But he drove himself on:

'An' I see the kind of a feller ye'd oughter have was like Hamp, here. An' that's mostly why I resked it to put that note under yer door, Hamp, the night Nat come——"

"What! Was it you who did that?" exclaimed Douglas.

"Me. Snake an' Nat was right close by my hole, never knowin' I was into it, an' Snake was edgin' Nat on to go down an' do for ye. When they was gone I wrote that warnin' an' snuck down 'long Dickabar an' left it for ye. I owed ye a good turn anyways, but I done it for Marry more'n for you."

A moment Douglas sat, realizing what the fugitive had risked in thus issuing from his covert and threading a mile of detective-haunted forest. Then he reached out and grasped the bony hand of the convalescent.

"You're a man!" he declared.

"I aim to be," said Steve with another gulp.

A short, awkward silence followed. Marion, sober-faced, tenderly stroked the shaggy black hair until Steve dodged, as if the caress were becoming torment. Uncle Eb glared fixedly at one of the cats. Douglas looked at all three; then arose as if reaching a determination.

"This isn't the way I'd thought of it, but it's as good as any," he said quietly. "I had intended first, Marion, to take you to an elderly friend of mine in town—Mrs. Wright, who takes a keen interest in young artists and who undoubtedly would remember your father. She's a dear old soul, and I know she'd be only too glad to make everything easy for you; she's a patroness of that school I spoke of, and besides that she could coach you on all those little things a lady of her type knows so well—speech and manners and clothes and the other points you'll have to learn in order to 'be somebody,' as you say. And I'd rustle a job down in the financial district and keep my promise to your mother—to look out for you as if you were my sister. And when you'd had time to see how you liked the change, and to find out what the city boys looked like, and so on—then I'd ask you a question.

"I wanted to give you a fair chance—not to jump this question at you before you fairly got your eyes open to this new world of yours. But circumstances alter cases. I'll take you to Mrs. Wright just the same, but I'm going to ask the question now instead of later. Like Steve, I'm not afraid to say it right out in front of everybody. What's more, Steve has the right to know what's what. And——"

He paused. The wide gray eyes dwelt unwaveringly on his. So did the old steel-blue eyes and the young brown ones.

"The first time we met," he went on, with a little smile, "you said you were 'Marry for short.' I'm asking you if you'll make it 'marry for good.' If so, we'll hunt up a parson when we tramp into New Paltz, and go down the river as Mr. and Mrs. Hampton."

Steadfastly she regarded him a moment longer. Steve and Uncle Eb sat breathless.

"Let me ask you somethin'," she returned. "If Steve had got sent back down-river you'd never have asked me this, would you?"

"Why—if I still thought you and he were sweethearts—probably not. It wouldn't be fair to either of you."

"Was that what you meant when you spoke 'bout Steve—that day up the crick?"

"Certainly. What did you think?"

"I thought all 'long you—didn't want to git too thick with a girl that was a—a half-sister to a feller that had been into the pen! That you couldn't have enough respect for a girl like that to—to—you know. And it—kind of hurt."

"Good Lord! I never even knew you two were brought up under the same roof, until the night your mother—that is, 'Liza Oaks—died. If I had, maybe I'd have asked sooner!"

The cool gray eyes grew warm. The red lips curved in a dimpling smile. But his question remained unanswered. Her gaze went to the waiting packs and guns. Outside, a horse stamped impatiently.

"Ain't it about time to be goin'?" she asked demurely. 'That hoss of Uncle Eb's is gittin' restless. Uncle Eb, you'd better git the cats into the bags."

"But ye ain't told Hamp—" Steve protested.

"I know it, foolish! And I ain't goin' to tell him till I git ready. It might be five minutes, or mebbe five years, he'll have to wait; and till he knows you won't know either. And that's all of that!"

Uncle Eb chuckled. Douglas spread his hands in resignation. Steve glowered, then half-grinned.

"Might a-knowed it," he muttered.

"Sassy as a red squir'l, ain't ye? Ye won't never git no better."

And with that the question was dropped. Ensued a scramble, ending in the confinement in burlap sacks of four spitting, spatting felines; a donning of hats and coats, a closing-up of stove-drafts, and a wabbly progress by Steve to Uncle Eb's waiting wagon. There he was enwrapped in a huge quilt. Uncle Eb clambered in and encased his legs in the horse-blanket. The horse started at once. And up the road slowly traveled the old man and his new fosterson, with dead Nigger Nat's muzzle-loader leaning stark and grim between them.

Behind them, swinging easily along the frozen road, walked the man and the maid, their faces reddening under the sharp kiss of the wintry air. Once, and once only, they paused to glance back at the abandoned house. Then they trudged on, silent.

At length the wagon stopped. The Clove road had ended, and the horse now stood in the true Traps road, heading westward. Up that way waited Uncle Eb's home. Eastward opened the Gap, and beyond lay the great Outside. This was the parting of the ways.

And here Steve spoke out, man to man.

"Hamp, I'm a-trustin' ye. But a feller never knows. If ever Marry should come a-crawlin' back into here, sorry an' shamed, then look out! I'll be a-comin' after ye wuss'n I ever went after Snake, an' I'll come a-shootin'. Tha's all. Good luck to the both o' ye."

"You won't be coming after me, lad," Douglas answered steadily. "We'll both be coming back to see you in the Spring, whether Marion's name then is Dyke or Hampton. And I'm leaving with you, as a pledge and a present—this."

Into the space between the two riders he swung his shotgun. Then he gripped Steve's hand and stepped back. The youth stared at his new gun as if the heavens had opened before him. Even when Marion climbed up and kissed him farewell he seemed dazed by the wonder of actually possessing such a weapon. Uncle Eb grinned dryly and gave Douglas an approving nod.

The old man's farewell was characteristically short. He gave each a straight look, a lift of the walrus mustache, a paralyzing handshake. Then:

"Luck to ye! G'yapalong!"

The wagon rolled away.

With a sigh and a smile, Douglas and Marion turned their faces eastward. Steadily they swung along the hummocky track, climbing upward, ever upward, by easy grade or steep slant, toward the Gap a mile away. From time to time they glanced at each other, but they spoke no word. The only sounds were the flapping of frozen leaves still adhering to cold boughs, the crunch of snow under heel, the occasional bay of a far-off hound.

So they came to the Jaws of the Traps, where the road sneaked between towering ledges and then pitched down in swift-dropping zigzags to the low hills of the Beyond. Out before them stretched a snowy panorama through which, black and slow, meandered the serpentine Wallkill. Away to the east, hidden behind intervening hills, flowed the wide Hudson. Far to the south, that river rolled past the vast city of New York, to be swallowed by the waiting ocean. But much nearer—only six miles off—stood out clearly a little town where lived clergymen, and where a wedding-ring could be bought; the first town on their outward way: New Paltz.

There between the crags they halted, poising on the brink between the Traps and the World, the hard old life and the nebulous new. Still they said nothing. His gaze dwelt on her, and hers on that town. Something counseled him to keep silence.

Then into the stillness came a sound from the north: a sound new to the man: a yapping confusion of noise suggesting the breathless chorus of a pack of hard-running dogs. It grew in volume until it became like the strident creak and groan of many rickety, unoiled wagons, full of discordant undertones and overnotes. Yet it was not on the ground, but in the air, somewhere beyond the northern cliff which blocked the view.

"Geese!" cried Marion. "I wondered why we hadn't heard some. They're late. But they're goin' fast now. The lakes up north are froze, and winter's comin' close. There they are!"

High up, a long wedge slid across the sky. Its lines wavered, bent, but never broke. Along them winked an unceasing quiver of strong-beating wings; from them fell the clamorous medley of voices old and young, deep and shrill. Straight as their wild instinct could guide them, straight as the man and the maiden below would speed down the river when they should reach the railroad, the birds were flying south.

"Goin' south—and so are we," the girl softly echoed his own thought. And they turned their eyes again to the roofs six miles away.

"Marion—dear—what is it to be?" he asked. "Let's decide."

A deeper color flowed into her cheeks, a roguish twinkle into her eyes. Half-shyly, she looked up at him.

"Ain't you scairt to marry a red-headed catamount?" she demanded. "They're awful critters to git along with."

"I never married one yet, but I'm not scared," he smiled. "I've held my own with every one I've met so far."

Under the curving brows flamed a daring, tantalizing light.

"Seems to me you—you ain't holdin' your own right now," she teased.

He blinked. Then light shot over his face. One stride, and his arms were around her.

"Who says I'm not?" he challenged.

"That's—that's better!"

Her arms clasped tight around his neck. Her lips rose, tremulous, questing, waiting. His head drooped, and his embrace tightened. And then between the crusted crags there stood no longer a girl of the hills and a man from outside. Lip to lip, heart to heart, soul to soul—the twain had become one.

After a time his head lifted. Passive, clinging, trembling, she lay back in his arms.

"Are you—sure we can find a—a parson down to Paltz?" she whispered.

He laughed, and drew her up to him again. Yielding lips stopped his breath, and the laugh died. But faintly from the south sounded an echo of his tender mirth—a bubbling, gabbling sound which in turn died out and was gone: the honking hilarity of the sharp-eyed wild geese.

THE END

SCALPED MEN

by E. L. S.

IN AUGUST, 1867, near Plum Creek Station, Nebraska, on the then building Union Pacific, two hundred and thirty miles from Omaha, the Cheyennes wrecked a hand-car carrying William Thompson, head lineman, and his crew of five. Thompson was shot through the right arm, knocked down with a rifle-butt, stabbed in the neck, and while still conscious was scalped.

"I felt as if the whole top of my head was taken right off," he afterward related.

When the Indian galloped away the scalp slipped from his belt, and Thompson crawled and got it. He arrived at Willow Island, fifteen miles west, with the scalp in his hand, and put it into a pail of water to keep it moist. It was nine inches long and four inches wide, and "looked like a drowned rat."

At Omaha the doctors replaced it upon his head and gave him hopes, but it did not stick. He took it home with him to England, but finally sent it back to Dr. R. C. Moore of Omaha; and it was upon exhibition in a jar of alcohol in the Omaha Public Library Museum.

In April, 1868, two U. P. freight conductors, Tom Cahoon and William Edmundson, were fishing in Lodge Pole Creek, a mile and a half out of Sidney, Nebraska.

The Sioux cut them off. Cahoon was shot down and scalped. He recovered; after completion of the road in 1869 ran as passenger conductor out of Ogden, Utah; lived in Ogden for some years, had a street there named for him, and wore his hat "well to the back of his head" by reason of a curious "bald spot."

RANSOM

by George E Holt

Author of "By the Grace of Allah," "Mohamed Ali and the Basha of Tangier," etc.

An Incident in the Affairs of Mohamed Ali

MOHAMED ALI lay in the filthy Moorish prison at Ain Dalia and was most uncomfortable in mind and body. Even the best of prisons in Morocco is not an agreeable place, and this one ranked far below the best. Ain Dalia itself was a dirty little interior town, and its jail was a single room in a stone house, with only one, foot-square window near the roof to afford light, and a door of iron bars which was so small that those entering or leaving must crawl on hands and knees. This was quite unpleasant in the former case; less so in the latter.

Mohamed Ali's discomfort of body was due to many things which do not need to be told of in detail. He had been there three weeks and when one can not wash or change one's clothing or go out of doors for three weeks a number of things are apt to result. Especially if there have been several so confined and one's former companions have left the filth and vermin of months of incarceration.

Furthermore, the darkness bothered his eyes, the mutterings and lamentations of the ancient man and the occasional blasphemy of the gaunt youth who until recently had been his fellow-prisoners, the tough, stale bread and dirty water which once a day were poked through the door—to be fought for, if he was to have his share—was insufficient and nauseating.

But though his bodily discomfort was great, it would have been even greater had it not been for his mental perturbation. That kept him from paying full attention to other matters. Mohamed Ali's head was on fire with anger and chagrin, and a million devils, each demanding revenge, romped around in it and would not let him sleep.

For Mohamed Ali was the victim of a trap, snared by a kind action. Had his heart not been touched by the false story of a brother who needed his aid; had he not left his secure hiding-place at the supposed call of his own blood, he would not be where he now found himself. And a million little devils would not be clamoring in his head for vengeance upon one Kaid Bargash, head man of the filthy village of Ain Dalia, who had thus tricked him and now held him prisoner.

Mohamed Ali desired liberty—but more than liberty he desired vengeance on kaid Bargash. Which, if the kaid had been wise, would have caused him to leave his village speedily, and to put the greatest distances between himself and Mohamed Ali. But being what he was, he was very proud of his achievement, and had no doubt that in due course Mohamed Ali's relatives and friends would get together the large ransom he demanded as the alternative to turning the outlaw over to the Sultan and taking the moderate reward offered by him.

Because Mohamed Ali was a political outlaw. Incidentally, he was also a *shareef*, or descendant of the Prophet, and formerly a basha. His political enemies having got

"Ransom," copyright, 1923, by George E. Holt

the upper hand for the time being, he had been forced to leave his bashaship and seek refuge in the foot-hills of the Atlas. This had made him fair game for the hunter.

Kaid Bargash was a greedy person, and so sought the greatest possible profit from his capture. When he had suggested ransom to Mohamed Ali that person had used language which had barbs on it, and had refused absolutely to send a message to his relatives concerning the matter. So Kaid Bargash had sent the message himself.

Three weeks had passed, without results, but Kaid Bargash was still assured of the eventual result and so the matter stood. He had not even hinted to his captive that, once the ransom had been paid, he intended turning him over to the Sultan. Kaid Bargash was avaricious, as I have said, and two rewards were better than one.

But one day there came into Ain Dalia an ancient beggar, clothed in rags and smeared with filth, and took up a position against the wall of the prison, just beneath the tiny window, where he sat and cried: "*All'arbi— All'arbi* " which means, "Alms, in the name of Allah the Compassionate." Also he begged from the merchants in the near-by market-place, some pieces of old gunny-sacking, of which he constructed a crude tent against the prison wall. Manifestly it was his intention to remain there for some time.

As this mode of establishing residence is common among Moroccan beggars, and as they are believed to bring good luck to those about them, he was not driven away.

That night, when all lights were out, and the only sounds were the faint tinkle of a native mandolin or the plaintive bark of a lonesome dog, Mohamed Ali, lying upon his pile of straw and killing insects, suddenly raised his head and stared at the little window. Through it came the sound of some one singing. The voice was old and cracked, but Mohamed Ali smiled as he listened to it a moment. Then he rose, crossed the room and threw himself down by the little door.

A voice greeted him, the voice of the singer, who was also the beggar. Who was also Mohamed Ali's brother.

Their conversation was lengthy—the guard, as usual with native guards, maintaining watch from the inside of a pleasant coffee-house, entirely out of view of the prison—but only two portions of it were of importance in this story. One was that his brother assured Mohamed Ali that by the next night one of the stones of the prison wall, against which his tent was built, would be quite loosened, and that thus Mohamed Ali might crawl quickly to freedom. The other was Mohamed Ali's refusal to do so.

"Much I desire freedom," he told his brother. "But more I desire revenge on Kaid Bargash."

He mentioned the kaid's ancestry somewhat in detail. He also cursed with some fluency the one good eye of Kaid Bargash, who wore a bandage over the socket which the other had occupied before it had been gouged out by an enemy's thumb. "Your arrival I have been expecting—and now give ear to my plan."

The next day the guard at the prison reported to his master that Mohamed Ali manifestly had lost his wits as a result of his imprisonment, in view of the fact that he now spent much of his time asserting that he was Kaid Bargash, and that Mohamed Ali was holding him prisoner. Also he had taken to wearing a bandage over one eye.

Kaid Bargash himself went to the door of the prison and verified his guard's tale. But he laughed. Wits or no wits, Mohamed Ali was the goose who should lay some golden eggs. Therefore he paid no further attention to him, leaving it to the guard to hear the constant ravings of a man who believed himself to be some one else.

AFTER some days of this, certain things happened. Half-a-dozen men, pausing to drop alms in the old beggar's bowl, exchanged a few words with him at the same time. These men thereafter gathered outside the town and conferred briefly. Kaid Bargash, went, alone, in the evening to see what ailed one of his retainers, living in a little hut in an orange garden, and failed to return to his own house——

Mohamed Ali and his brother, having pushed Kaid Bargash unceremoniously through the opening in the prison wall at the back of the beggar's tent, replaced the big stone and quickly cemented the cracks, smearing the fresh cement with earth. Then Mohamed Ali went swiftly through the night to the silent market-place, where half-a-dozen dark figures joined him, and they went forth upon the road which runs north.

That night and the next day there was much commotion in Ain Dalia. Kaid Bargash could not be found, although all his servants sought him. And in the prison one raved lustily as before—perhaps even more lustily—that he was Kaid Bargash and that Mohamed Ali held him prisoner.

Even the *casbah* guard got tired of it. When he went to leave the bread and water, and the prisoner with the brown beard and the bandage over one eye—only half-visible in the darkness of the prison—began the old story, he spat at him and threatened to enter and beat him unless he fell silent. But as this had no effect the jailor went away.

All this commotion was nothing as compared to that of the following day. For then an official of the Sultan, with a numerous escort, clattered into Ain Dalia and inquired for Kaid Bargash. Upon being told that he was not to be found, the visitors rode at once to the prison took the keys from the guard and commanded him who called himself Kaid Bargash to come forth. He came, cursing Mohamed Ali viciously.

"And why does Kaid Bargash—if you *are* Kaid Bargash—curse Mohamed Ali?" asked the Sultan's officer.

"Because—because he tricked me!"

"Then you had him prisoner here?"

"Of course, the dog! His men——"

"A moment." The officer interrupted. "You held Mohamed Ali a prisoner. Did you inform our master the Sultan who greatly desired his person, and who had offered a reward for him?"

Then fear wrapped Kaid Bargash like a mantle and he fell upon his knees, for he perceived what was to follow.

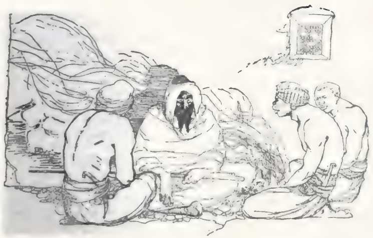
"You are a traitor, beyond all doubt," said the officer. "Even as Mohamed Ali said."

"As Mohamed Ali said?" questioned the kneeling man. "As Mohamed Ali——"

"Yes—fool! He sent us word that you had held him for his people to ransom, but that he had escaped. And so—" He made a motion to his men, who seized the unhappy kaid, bound his wrists with ropes, and led him away. As they passed round the prison the old beggar was taking down his tent; apparently he was going elsewhere.

"*All'arbil*" he cried. "Alms, in the name of Allah the Compassionate." But no one paid any attention to him.

A little later there were screams, and a shot from behind the prison. Justice or injustice is dealt out quickly in Morocco.



A DEATH FIGHT

by William Wells

Author of "The Closed Trail," "When Bill Applegate Made His Will," etc.

THE cook sat poring over a month-old paper, evidently much interested.

"What're you grinning about, Shorty?" inquired "Timberline" Johnson. "It must be good."

"Reading about one of them Italian dukes fighting a duel with a French prince," Shorty replied. "It must have been more fun than a dog-fight; I'd like to have seen it."

"I wouldn't," Timberline told him. "One of their duels would be about as exciting as playing stud with a cent ante."

"Boots" Wilson of the 2 Bar spoke up.

"Anybody'd think you was a judge of duels, Timberline, the way you're talking."

"I am," Timberline told him. "I've seen a heap of 'em, and I saw one once that was a lulu. It was up in the Two-Gwo-Tee-e country in the Wind Rivers, where the water runs three ways and you're that high in the air it takes two hours to hard-boil an egg, if you had 'em to boil.

"A bunch of us was up there—never mind what we were after—and it wasn't what you'd call an easy crowd to handle. Old Teton—he was a squaw man that lived with the Shoshones—was along, with three of his Indian brothers-in-law and a couple more Shoshones, and Dick Cranston and his partner from Laramie, and some others that I don't remember. We were traveling light with just a few packs and keeping our eyes skinned, for all the big war-trails crossed both ways through there and you never knew what you'd run up against. Crows, Bannocks, Blackfeet, Sioux, a war-party of 'em was liable to land on top of you any time.

"We were in considerable of a hurry and took more chances than we ought to, which got us into trouble like it always does— most people that loses their hair does it by being in a rush.

"One morning daylight caught us just as we come to the edge of a park a couple of miles across—we hadn't made the time we expected during the night—and it was a poor place to camp, no water and no grass except out in the open—the timber was all pine right there.

"We knew there was a creek at the bottom of a quaking-aspen ridge with lots of wild oats and pea-vine among the trees on the other side of the park, so we started across, and when we were right out in the middle here comes about seventy-five Sioux busting out of the timber off to our left, flogging their horses and spreading out so as to drive us ahead of them, for the park ran a long ways that direction and we'd stand no show against that many in a running fight."

"About two-hundred yards ahead of us was a bunch of big rocks like there is in that country—they say they was left there when glaciers was all over that country—with quaking-aspen trees and bushes growing among them, and we made for them on the high jump and got in among 'em before the Sioux came close enough to begin shooting.

"It was a regular fort, the rocks in a sort of circle with an open space in the middle, the whole thing maybe fifty yards across. We slid off our horses and ran back to the edge of the cover, thinking perhaps the Sioux would swing off, but they didn't; they came right on like Indians will sometimes when they get excited chasing any one that's running away.

"They made a fine sight, all in their war-paint and war-dress, their war-bonnets

"A Death Fight," copyright 1923, by Wm. Wells.

streaming out behind, the ponies running belly to the ground and the riders yelling the war-whoop, but we wasn't there for fun, and like I told you it was a hard crowd to handle.

"We all had the .44 Winchesters—they was new then and the Indians hadn't got many of them—and we gave it to them good and plenty. Two or three of them tumbled off their horses before they noticed what we were doing, and then they all swung down on their horses sides and split, most of them coming to our right and twenty or so to the left, whooping and shooting under their horses necks.

"Naturally, most of our bunch stayed on the side where the big lot of Sioux were, dodging along the rocks and slamming it to them as they went by and only two of us—one of the Shoshones and me—were on the other. Both of our magazines were empty and when we were filling them the Indians on our side noticed there was no one shooting and swinging their ponies here they came, piling off and running in afoot when they got close.

"The rocks were only a few feet apart on that side, with the small trees and brush so thick it was hard to get through them and that was all that saved us, for I only had three cartridges in the gun when the rush came and the Shoshone was no better off.

"I was down on one knee between two rocks with my rifle between a couple of little trees and I got the first Sioux—a young buck without a war-bonnet—square through the chest, and down he went. I jerked in another shell but the smoke came back in my face and I don't know whether I got meat with the other two shots or not. Then the Sioux were up against us and scrambling over the rocks—they couldn't get through the brush between them.

"I jumped back, sticking in a cartridge, and just then a Sioux landed on top of me from off of a rock and down I went, him striking at my head with a war-club and me hanging on to his arm with my left hand so that he couldn't hit hard and trying to get hold of my six-shooter or knife with the right, both of us rolling over and over and him making me see stars every crack he gave. Then he gave a grunt and rolled off—he was on top that second, and I got hold of my gun and came up standing, the blood running down my face and my head spinning.

"The Sioux lay there kicking with a bullet in his ribs and just ahead of me two more were jumping down off the rock, for things were happening quick. I cut down on the first and crippled him—he gave a screech and toppled over—and somebody killed the other, he going down all in a heap.

"Four or five more were coming over, but they were all hit about the same time, some of 'em falling inside and some out, for the big bunch of the Sioux had sheered off and gone by—the bullets was coming too fast for them—and the boys on that side, hearing the Sioux war-whoop had faced about and was cutting loose as quick as they could jerk lever.

"If what was left of the Sioux had had the nerve to stick it out they could have made it awful hot for us, them on one side of that narrow line of stone and brush and us on the other, for they were as many as we were, but they ran back to their horses and lit out, and the row was over for a while. When we had time to size things up none of us was hurt bad—me about the worst and all I had was a barked-up head—and three or four more were scratched.

"The Sioux were bunched up out in the flat out of range and they must have been feeling mighty sick—they'd lost fifteen or twenty men and there were twenty-seven dead and crippled ponies scattered around, some of them trying to get up, others limping around with broken legs, and these we shot first thing, so as to show the Sioux we had plenty of ammunition left. We dropped a few bullets out where they were and made 'em move, though you had to hold so high you couldn't hit anything.

"The Shoshones scouted around and picked up eleven scalps, for what of the Sioux had been killed out of the big bunch had been carried off by the rest, and they tied 'em on a rope and held 'em up between two poles so that the Sioux could count 'em—Indians are mean-natured that way—yelling in a way to make cold shivers run over you while they did it. I've run with Indians a lot and they're not half-bad in some ways, but they're sure bloodthirsty devils when they get stirred up.

"So there we were, deadlocked. The Sioux couldn't get us out of there once we got strung out right and they knew it, and they couldn't starve us out because we had our horses and could get water by digging

—those high parks are just like a sponge from the melting snow in early summer like this was, especially around a pile of rocks where the drifts are deep.

"Besides, they didn't dare stay long, this being war-ground and a party of Crows or Shoshones being liable to light straddle of 'em at any time. But it wasn't likely they'd let us take a fall out of 'em like we had without trying to get even, but that didn't worry us any—we knew we could hold 'em level.

"Everything was quiet for an hour or so and then one of the Sioux leaves the rest and rides straight toward us, walking his horse slow. Of course nobody shot at him—we knew he was coming to make a talk—and he come up to about a hundred yards and stopped. He was sure a fine-looking Indian, a big war-chief by his dress. His shirt, leggin's and moccasins were solid bead and porcupine quill-work and the ends of his war-bonnet came down on both sides of his horse almost to the ground.

"The horse was one of these black and white paint-ponies the Indians think so much of and it was a war-horse all right—war paint all over it. The Indian didn't have any saddle, just a buckskin rope girthed around the horse and his knees stuck through it and another around the horses jaw. All he had was a lance, a shield on his left arm and a bow and quiver of arrows, no gun. Of course he had a knife in his belt.

"He sat there a minute and then he began to say things. Talk about strong language, he had 'em all faded. You know the first thing an Indian picks up is the cuss words and he had 'em all.

"The main part of his remarks was to the effect that he could lick single-handed any son of a dog of a white man that ever walked and his words was sure spicy and abusive. You see that was the Indian of it. They'd been whipped bad and lost a lot of scalps with no chance to get any back but if he, a big chief, could kill a white man his face would be saved and if he got killed it would be better to die that way than to go home defeated.

"Teton was the first to get the drift of the Sioux remarks and he went loco right away, being pretty near Indian himself and a hard-boiled killer to boot.

"'I'll either be in —— tonight or I'll be roasting that red cur's heart and eating it; and it'll be a long time before I shake hands with the ——,' he yells, making a break for his horse.

"He piles on and goes out through the brush a flying, six-shooter in hand and whooping worse than any red-skin I ever heard.

"The Sioux don't waste any time, he bends over his horse's neck and comes at Teton with his lance, his shield up to cover his shoulders and lower part of his face, and those raw-hide shields off a buffalo bull's neck will turn a six-shooter bullet unless it hits square, which don't always happen.

"Teton cuts loose all five shots but don't get the Sioux, though he cuts a couple of furrows in him, and just as we think Teton's sure spitted he goes down on the side of his horse, being some rider himself, and as the lance goes over him grabs it and twists it out of the Indian's hand, though he hangs on till he's near pulled off his horse.

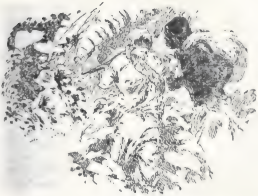
"They go by each other flying and both whirl their horses around, the Sioux pulling his bow and whipping out an arrow as he does so. Teton straightens up, heads his horse for the Indian's and jams in the spurs and goes down again before the Sioux can pull—Teton's horse going at the other like shot out of a gun, taking an arrow in the shoulder which don't stop him and hitting the smaller pony with his chest square in the side—the Sioux trying to turn out of the way and not being quick enough.

"The pony goes rolling, the Sioux coming clear but getting an awful fall, and by the time he's on his feet Teton's set his horse back on its tail and is down and coming at the Sioux with his knife. The red meets him all right, both of them yelling like mad wolves.

"But the Sioux ain't in it with Teton at knife play. Teton slashes the Indian's knife-arm a couple of times so quick you can't follow it, grabs the wrist with his left hand and closes in, sending his knife in up under the redskin's ribs in spite of him hanging on to Teton's arm, all he can, with his left hand.

"They wrestle a little, then the Indian goes down and Teton scalps him while he's still jerking, being as bad as any of them when he's stirred up, and waves the hair at the Sioux with the Shoshone scalp whoop, but they never move. If the chief wanted to come over and be killed in fair fight that was his business, not theirs.

"That's all there was to it. The Sioux stayed around until dark, but they'd had enough and the next morning they were gone. We didn't move that day—thought they might be laying for us—but that night we pulled out and didn't see anything more of them."



A GAME IN THE BUSH

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by Georges Surdez

Author of "The Yellow Streak."

FRED STEWART sat up impatiently.

No use trying to sleep. The monotonous, nerve-racking beat of the tom-toms in the market-place hammered on his brain. Lifting the mosquito netting, he got out of bed. Clad only in light pajamas, he made his way to the veranda. He was bored and half-sick with weakness from a recent bout with malaria. And every Saturday night the same thing. The tom-toms and the noise usually started at eight and kept up until two or three in the morning.

Through an open space in the cluster of bamboo huts he could see the natives now, dancing in stiff-legged steps. The warm wind, brushing over his cheek like a clammy live thing, brought with it the shrill laugh of the "mammies," the guttural shouts of the bucks and the effluvium from perspiring bodies soaked in palm oil.

The lights of the fire, illuminating the circle of dancers, but leaving the rest of the crowd in darkness, revealed the superb muscular development of the young men, the graceful strong forms of their women and the wrinkled, shrunken limbs of the old people.

The scene, weird and unreal, seemed like one of his boyhood nightmares.

Was the excitement greater than usual tonight? He suddenly remembered this was the end of the month. The natives had received their wages and the allowance of rum distributed as a bonus. The nights were bad enough without this— Stewart turned around in disgust and went back to bed, where he lay staring into the darkness, conscious only of the throbbing in his temples keeping time to the beat of the tom-toms.

He lay scarcely five minutes. Then he got up. He could have sworn he had been trying to sleep for hours. This time he went out into the yard and awakened the Senegalese watchman, glad of the opportunity to vent his temper. Then back to the veranda to a little table in the corner where the drinks and a tin of Capstan cigarets were always kept ready.

There, in a comfortable wicker chair, he drew close the square-faced bottle of gin and the squat brown jug of bitters. With the devout look of a priest performing a sacred rite he poured a few drops of the brown liquid into a glass and turned it in his long thin fingers until the fluid had formed a thin film over the entire inner surface. He then filled the glass with gin and drank in little sips alternating with puffs at the cigaret.

There would be no sleep until the dance was over. Drink after drink, cigaret following cigaret, a usual way to spend the night from Saturday to Sunday. He might read, but for the last few weeks he had received no new books or magazines. As for letters, they were far between. Furthermore, when the lamp was lighted the flies, bugs, beetles, gathered in serried columns and flickered around the light, crawled on him, got into his drink.

After the fifth gin and bitters he started thinking. The old, old question presented itself. Why had he come to this lonely station on the African West Coast to feed on tinned meats and tasteless fish? Why should he do without his rightful share of the things that make life worth while? No companionship, no recreation except drink. The more he drank and thought, the less did he understand.

He recalled his school days in England. White people. His mother was dead. On his nineteenth birthday he had enlisted for the Great War. The trenches, four years of hell broken by brief interludes of leave. Then the return home and—Charlotte Briggs, his first, his only love affair. They wanted to marry, but he could find no work to support them both.

The only solution was to go away somewhere and earn money to make a start. To his surprize she encouraged the idea. They must sacrifice to be happy later. In Liverpool he obtained without difficulty a clerical position on the West Coast. Sorrow at leaving Charlotte was mitigated by the excitement of moving toward new lands. He imagined a life beneath palm trees, big-game hunting, adventures.

On the dock, just before departure, she was calm, but he had been nearly crazed with sudden grief. He begged her to think of him often and to write and then whispered again that he would be able to save three hundred pounds during the two years' stay. The ship swung into the harbor and passed out toward the open sea. He watched her handkerchief to the last.

Stewart poured himself more gin and swallowed it at a gulp. The tom-toms were still beating. Perhaps some whisky would make him feel better. He called the boy. Yes, it helped. He went back to his reverie.

How lonely he had been on ship that first day out! And all the days afterward the loneliness had not decreased. He suffered, longing for Charlotte's voice, for the touch of her hand. For her sake he resisted temptations, the least of which was drink. Six months after his arrival at Grand Bassam he was transferred to Grand Lahou, a distance of four days' travel. He accepted gladly. There were no more than ten white men there, but he saw only the financial advantage—more money to send to England. He became accustomed to loneliness.

He wrote long letters, letters that took a month to reach home. He sent the money away at the end of each month. She was banking it and working herself in an office and saving a little. At first her letters came by every boat, then not so often. Once he spent a stretch of two months without news. God! Those two months!

He poured another drink. The tom-toms were repeating it—

"Two months — two months — two months."

But her letters must have been lost, so she wrote at last, and he had been consoled, good for another stretch.

MEMORIES were not pleasant now. The native servant, awaiting orders, sensed something wrong. His master had an uncanny accuracy of aim, a powerful throwing arm and a habit of venting his gloom upon the nearest person. The boy slid off the stairs softly as a cat.

But Stewart was deep in the past.

Charlotte had not been the best of correspondents. He had tried to find excuses for her. As his exile drew to a close he became enthusiastic, full of hope. When he heard he was to sail on the S. S. *Bamako* he joyously packed up spears, hats, native jewelry delicately made of raw gold—souvenirs for Charlotte.

A dream, that trip down the lagoon to Grand Bassam! He arrived at the head office a full week before sailing-time. But he had attained a reputation, made good at his job and he feared no reprimand.

The manager, "One Bottle" Billways, had earned his name. The old type of Coaster, he had been in the country before the white man had a firm hold, when sailing-vessels came to barter with the natives, and he took pride in the fact that out of thirty years he had spent but three in Europe. And always one bottle of gin a day, besides his regular drinks.

His vitality in spite of excesses was still tremendous. Fifty years old he was still powerful, although he had suffered all the diseases known to the Coast. His carelessness about his health was the talk of the colony. And he was a man who often did the unexpected. Once he stayed sober for three days—on a bet. Normally one hour after leaving his office he entered the Lord's Vineyards and remained there until bedtime. Yet morning would find him at work sober, with not even a headache.

Billways wanted Stewart to sign another two-years' contract.

"I can't do that," Stewart had answered with a quiet smile.

"So she's waiting for you——"

"Yes, she's waiting."

The next day a boat got in from home and he went to the post office on the chance there might be a letter. He had waited inside, aloof from the talkative groups of white people who were exchanging news from home, quietly elated, at the thought of the near departure. How his heart beat with joy when he looked at the envelope and recognized the familiar handwriting. News from her. Then— God!

He got up and paced the veranda, his head between his hands. Even the drink was no good any more; he was used to it.

The letter, brief. She told him, without evasion, that she would not be there for him when he came back. She was sorry about the money. It was gone. How, she did not tell. But she did say that he could not have loved her and gone so far away. He would forget, she wrote.

He laughed bitterly at the thought. Forget! Six months ago and still crushing his heart, still stifling him. He took another drink. His cigaret was glowing in the dark, and he contemplated it calmly enough, outwardly. But his heart was undergoing in recurrent waves the torture of six months before. The tom-toms had lulled for a while, and only faint shouts could be heard. The flames were dying out, and a sense of depression and utter loneliness crept over him. He realized now the tom-toms had been a relief.

She told him that she loved another, had loved him for months. That he, Stewart was not the man for her. Too fond of travel! He had remained there with the letter in his hand until curious glances awakened him to reality.

Smithy, Billways' clerk, who had seemed so sarcastic, so cynical, had taken him to a café, sat down with him and invited confidence. As consolation he told his own story. He had been engaged to the one girl. A week before the wedding she had died. Not a long sickness, not an accident. Something stupid, trivial. She had eaten ice cream and died. And he had thought Smithy lucky. His girl had died. She hadn't loved another.

That night for the first time he got drunk. He gambled, not caring whether he lost or won. He remembered thinking, as the cards grouped themselves in his careless fingers, "Lucky at cards, unlucky in love." He collected his winnings and finished the night with Smithy roaming in the native village. Smithy told Stewart there was no sense thinking he could not bear up.

Next morning found him in Billways' office. Billways' experience of men and things on the Coast was extensive. He was a sage in his own way. The whole thing was clear. Silently he pulled a contract from the drawer of his desk. Without a word Stewart signed.

"Taking your leave?" Billways had asked.

"No," Stewart answered shortly, and went out, bound for another twenty-four months.

But was this not his life, his home the little bungalow in Grand Lahou? On the way back he thought ceaselessly of Charlotte. His mind formed pictures that twisted and raked his soul. To others on the lagoon steamer he appeared stupidly apathetic. No one realized that he was dead. Yes dead! Not physically but mentally. He was just a throbbing mangled thing. He was through with life.

Tired of tramping along the veranda he sank into his chair again.

"Dead—dead—" said the tom-toms.

Another drink.

Yes, that first night alone in the bungalow he had opened his trunk and found his Webley Scott automatic. He had loaded the magazine and laid the neat, compact weapon on the table. It looked friendly, tempting, all black save the shining barrel lighted by the moonlight. A move, a slight pressure of the finger— No, it was too obvious, too easy, not sporting. A chap should fight it out. His sense of fair play held him back. It had been a Saturday night, and the tom-toms had said—

"Shoot, you fool, shoot."

God! If they kept it up now, he would.

If they kept up while he counted to fifty. He counted. They thumped on. He fixed the limit at one hundred.

"If there's really a controlling force, a God, He will stop them before I reach the end of the count. If they don't either there is no God or I'll be justified to finish it." Such was his morbid reasoning.

He did not fear death. No he wanted it. Would he ever be free from his pain otherwise? Would he—would he— He fell asleep at last. Sprawling in the chair, his pajama coat open leaving his chest bare, sodden with drink he slept.

The boy crept back and, because the master was kind when sober, fetched a blanket. The night air gave the white man sickness. Had not other masters died after lying all night stripped on the veranda? And he didn't want his master to die, for he was just and kind when sober.

STEWART awoke the next morning very late, not rested, his head still throbbing. He sat down to a breakfast-lunch of fried sausages from a tin, fried eggs, marmalade and tea. But he toyed with the food listlessly. Clad in clean whites, a usual morning habit, he lounged on the veranda, lighting one cigaret from the butt of another.

Nothing to do. A day to kill. No books. He was out of cartridges for his shotgun—no hunting. And fishing from a canoe in the broiling sun was not appealing. He called for the bottle of gin and smiled grimly. Of late his bottle lasted but a day. Perhaps, in five or ten years, he would be called "One Bottle" Stewart.

Yes, if he lived.

But why wait for the alcohol to work? Just the other day a chap down the coast had cut his throat with a safety razor blade. Others had made a neater job with a rope.

He got up violently and started for a walk. Anything to get away from this craze that kept recurring again and again. His field was limited. Grand Lahou occupies a sandy strip of ground squeezed between the Gulf of Guinea and the Lagoon that stretches for miles along the Ivory Coast.

Stewart had nothing in common with the French traders. The one or two other Anglo-Saxons he loathed for being coarse, foul-mouthed brutes. As he passed, the natives greeted him in their deep resonant dialect. He answered absent-mindedly, vaguely aware of the little "picki'n's" who stared at him in awe and dug their grimy toes in the dirt. Nowhere to go but to the beach. He went there and sat down.

The surf pounded the shore. The spray was blown into his face by a wind from over the sea—the sea that led to England. People there couldn't understand. They had never seen the moonlight shining on the barrel of an automatic. He got up and resumed his aimless wandering and soon found himself back before his bungalow.

FRENCH WEST AFRICA
IVORY COAST
GOLD COAST
NIGERIA
ANGLO-EGYPTIAN SUDAN
EQUATORIAL AFRICA
KAMERUN
GULF OF GUINEA
FRENCH CONGO
BELGIAN CONGO
ATLANTIC OCEAN
PORTUGESE WEST AFRICA
RHODESIA
SOUTHWEST AFRICA
BECHUANALAND
UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA
CAPE TOWN
AFRICA
SCALE

A messenger, dripping with perspiration, waited for him with a letter. It was from Billways:

> This is too much work for you alone and you must need companionship. So we have an assistant coming on the *Bandama* due Sunday at Grand Lahou.

Stewart's first emotion was one of anger. Billways had no doubt heard the reports of his drinking bouts. The natives knew everything.

But he could handle the work. The place was his. He had built it up to a high efficiency and made profits. The assistant might be a heavy, sullen, homesick lad, or, worse still, a talkative cockney like that fellow Perkins in Grand Bassam. Well, he'd put him in the annex. Their lives would be separate. Why should he, Stewart waste time on any one?

As he considered the situation more

calmly he realized that with help he could extend the business. Besides, the new man might bring books. In reading Stewart found momentary forgetfulness. And papers— Stewart grudgingly admitted that he was still interested in sports. How were Scotland and Wales getting on in football? Had Jimmy Wilde been knocked out?

He sat down on the steps of the veranda and pushed his helmet back. His tense face showed the first sign of relaxation. The men here thought only of drink and women and spent their leave home, carousing. Perhaps this chap was a decent fellow, a man who loved sports.

He looked out to sea to the northwest. The boat was due today. Was that the faint smudge of smoke on the horizon? He glanced at his watch. Two o'clock. He hurried into the house for field glasses. Yes, it must be the *Bandama*, the steamer that now showed masts up over the brim of the world. He called the boy and ordered the spare room in readiness. He poured out a whisky and for the first time in months took it with soda. There was a new spring to his step.

He had never realized how much he needed companionship. He hoped the chap wouldn't be like Perkins. Perkins was a pimply lad, short and skinny and delighted in "good" stories at mealtime. Early in the game he had won Stewart's disregard by a risqué yarn concerning a fiancée left at home. Stewart had seen in it a direct insult at Charlotte even though Perkins was not aware of her existence. He smiled now. By Jove, the chap had been nearly right!

Realizing that he had smiled, he was filled with sudden astonishment. Yes, the ache within him had dwindled. He could think of Charlotte without being hurt. The fearful mental strain of months seemed at last to be lifted.

A GRINDING of chains, shouted orders and curses from Chief Officer Smith, and the engines stopped, and the heavy inland swell took the *Bandama* on its bosom.

Robert Bernard, hand on the railing, looked toward the shore. Rainbows showing through the foam of the combers as they smashed on the golden sand of the beach, straggling palm-trees brought out sharply against a blue sky, native huts, here and there a painted bungalow—all this did not impress Robert Bernard. But one thought was uppermost. What sort of a man would he find in Stewart?

He could not ignore the heat. Oppressive, neither dry nor damp, it seemed to wrap him in a cloak, to press on his body from all sides. The unusual feel of his sun-helmet, the queer cries of the native passengers picked up at points along the coast joyous now at reaching their destination, the wind that reminded him of the warmth of a furnace, filled him with a curious uneasiness.

A boat had put off from shore and, skillfully handled, made its way through the breakers. Twelve paddlers, working away at top speed, chanted a droning song to which they kept time:

"Ehiiea—atsuh. Ehiiea—atsuh."

The black in the stern turned his steering-oar, and the craft shifted its course and came alongside. The *Bandama* rolled in a heavy swell, and the surf-boat scraped and bumped against her side. Ropes were thrown out, and the natives shinned up like a swarm of huge monkeys. Chattering and grunting, they awaited the distribution of food, a usual Coast custom.

To Bernard, the last few minutes on board dragged longer than the entire trip. He found the formalities of farewell irksome. With a sigh of relief he stepped to the ladder and down. The *Bandama* towered above him. A miscalculation, and his leg might be crushed between the bolted iron plates and the surf boat. He jumped and fell in a heap. The steersman in command assisted him to a seat. The natives pushed with their paddles, and the boat detached itself.

"Guiieya—atsuh. Guiieya—atsuh," sang the gigantic fellow in the stern.

Like mechanical puppets moved by the same spring the boys plunged their paddles into the sea, their muscles knotting and flowing under their gleaming black skins. Close to shore the steersman guided the boat upon a roller. Directed by shortly grunted orders, the crew held back from the crest. The foam from the breaking combers formed a mist, through which the sun shone in miniature rainbows. The steersman grunted a final order as the wave broke, and with powerful strokes the crew shot the boat forward with express-train speed. The powerful pilot looked toward the white man to reassure him, but found his encouragement not needed.

Bernard was disturbed. Why had he not given a false name when contracting for the position? One can not think of everything. The interviews, long waits, letters—full six months it had taken him to be assigned as Stewart's assistant.

Grinding of the boat's keel on the sand, and the natives jumped into the swirling waters waist-deep and hauled the craft further up on the shore. The steersman offered his broad shoulders, and Bernard was carried to shore.

"Hello—glad to see you," a warm, pleasant voice greeted him.

Bernard turned to face a tall thin man, a man slightly stooped. A battered sun-helmet shaded the upper part of his face, but the lines about his mouth and chin were deeply pronounced.

"I'm glad to see you," Bernard returned. "Is Mr. Stewart, Kingley Company's agent, here? I'm Robert Bernard."

"I'm Stewart."

Bernard was startled. He had seen Stewart's photograph, taken a few days before departure for Africa, a robust, round-faced fellow twenty-six years of age, if he remembered rightly. How he had changed in less than three years!

"You're my assistant, I suppose," Stewart was saying.

"Yes," Bernard managed to reply.

For a moment they regarded each other. Stewart broke the silence.

"Come on to the bungalow and have a drink."

"Thank you, I will."

As they passed among the native huts, Bernard, his mouth set and tense, did not give the half-clad natives more than a glance. Even the odors of palm oil and sweat and a mixture of all the stenches of the West Coat did not call forth remark.

"First trip out?" Stewart asked, evidently to make conversation.

"Yes," Bernard mumbled shortly.

At the bungalow Stewart showed him around then took him to the veranda where they sat down in comfortable wicker chairs facing each other. Again that queer silence between them. Bernard was pleased to see that Stewart was ill at ease.

"Which do you prefer?" Stewart reached for the bottles.

"Whisky and soda."

Stewart bent over the glasses. Bernard looked up instinctively as a man who feels himself watched. Standing at hand was the giant steersman of the boat. The fellow was at least six foot eight, his proportions perfect. For a brief moment Bernard met the negro's eyes.

"Massa," the black ventured timidly.

"Yes, Sakki," Stewart said without turning.

"Them man's boxes he be here. Where I go put 'em?"

"Put them for other house," Stewart ordered, adding, "This be Massa Bernard."

"He go stop for this place?" Sakki inquired.

Stewart looked up in surprize.

"Yes," he snapped out shortly. "Here you are," he said to Bernard and passed the drink across the table.

They lifted their glasses.

"Here's luck!"

"Cheerio," Bernard murmured.

And he drank with the man he had come nine thousand miles to kill.

A WEEK later Stewart and Bernard were again on the veranda. Stewart, as usual, poured the drinks, a fine art to which he would trust no one.

"A little more Grenadine?" he asked, and without waiting for an answer added the thick red fluid to the yellow Cinzano in the tall glass.

"You must know hundreds of mixtures," Bernard remarked. "And all good, too."

"Drink is the chief consolation of the Coaster," Bernard said jokingly, but with an undercurrent of seriousness. "When the news from home is bad, when a man longs for lights and music and white faces—"

"He takes a drink——"

"And enters into the Lord's Vineyards."

"The Lord's Vineyards?"

"That's true—you might not know. I picked the expression up from the French, I guess. It's quite common. Noah was one of the first, I believe, to make wine. And sometimes he tried to drown his troubles—in the '*vignes du Seigneur*'."

"Are the Lord's Vineyards always attainable?" Bernard questioned presently.

"No," Stewart answered shortly.

"If they were it would be hardly fair."

"And why?"

"Suppose a chap had done a wrong—to a woman, let us say." Bernard paused with a sharp look at Stewart. "It would be absolutely unfair that he should hold the key to forgetfulness, wouldn't it?"

Stewart hesitated.

"I guess it would be," he agreed. "But things aren't always fair. Sometimes the fellow who really deserves peace is denied it. The quantity needed to open the portals increases as habit grows."

"A man shouldn't resort to drinks to forget."

Stewart looked at Bernard calmly, almost pitingly.

"Hope you'll never have to."

Bernard, about to answer, lifted his eyes and found Sakki looking at him. Stewart followed his glance.

"Sakki, you may go," he said.

Sakki made as if to speak, thought better of it and entered the dining-room. From where he sat Bernard could see his white coat in the room's semi-darkness.

"My boy Sakki seems to worry you," Stewart remarked.

"Oh, I don't worry. But his size, you'll admit, is enough to attract attention."

"Yes, he's large even for a Kroo. Perhaps you noticed he's a wonderful water-boy."

"He certainly can handle a surf-boat."

"Never capsized with a white man on board. That's his boast."

"But if he is a boatman why does he serve around the house?"

"To be near me, I guess," was Stewart's explanation. "I believe he's quite devoted. You mustn't mind his staying around. He can't understand the ordinary English."

The conversation turned to sports. Bernard had comparatively recent news. He had even seen the Jimmy Wilde fight just before sailing. The thin, yellow-skinned, ageless man sparkled and became voluble as Bernard described the scene. He excitedly told in detail the last fight he had witnessed.

Bernard's hand moved to his pocket and closed tightly on the butt of the Colt automatic, the muzzle pointed toward Stewart where he sprawled in the big wicker chair. The buckle of his belt shone brightly in the moonlight. There was the obvious target. To pull the trigger, to see him slither to the floor— He bent forward, tense, ready. Another second, and it would have been done.

A white coat loomed above him. Sakki was there clearing the table of empty decanters and bottles. It was uncanny how Sakki had sensed the moment. Time after time this had happened, and Bernard was at a loss. At a most unexpected moment the black would come softly on the veranda, and when the two white men were walking together through the town or on the beach he was always somewhere close. Bernard was liked by the natives, but he sensed the enmity of Sakki. How could he get Stewart away, alone?

From sports at home the conversation drifted to West Coast sports. Only two worth mentioning, drinking and hunting.

"There must be plenty of game in the bush," Bernard suggested.

"Oh, yes."

"Buffaloes and elephants?"

"Buffaloes, no. They're in the Soudan where the forest belt ends. Elephants here, of course, but one must have a special permit to shoot them. And quite an escort. It runs into money."

"And lions?"

"In the Soudan. All we can offer here are a few leopards, plenty of monkeys, crocodiles in the river, occasionally a hippo. And bush pig, that's sport! They're sagacious. Takes a real bushman to bag one."

"Must be sport, all right," Bernard hinted.

"Would you like to try?"

"I'm afraid it would be too much bother for you."

"Not at all! I have a detachable motor that fits on the stern of my canoe. A few hours, and we can be in thick bush."

"That would be splendid," Bernard agreed enthusiastically. "Get us away from sight and sound of the black, not to mention smell."

"I usually take a boy to start the motor, prepare the lunch and dive after game."

"Oh, I say—it would be a treat to get away from them."

"They are childlike and obvious, but are they so unspeakably bad?" Stewart laughed.

"They get on my nerves. Perhaps it's because they remind me I'm a long way from home."

"As you wish, old man. We'll go alone.

"Fine! And when?"

"Saturday. I could leave my native clerk in charge. He could handle the trade."

"Fine!" Bernard repeated again.

The fool! He didn't deserve to escape.

SATURDAY morning Bernard was up before sunrise. Things were breaking right for him. He went out to meet Stewart at the lagoon landing.

Sakki was there, sitting in the canoe.

"Where Massa Stewart he be?" Bernard inquired.

The negro regarded him placidly:

"Dem thing that go *chugchug* he broke. Massa Stewart he go fix it. He be for shop."

After a quick sharp look at Sakki's broad guileless face Bernard turned on his heel. On the way to the shop he tried to fight down a premonition that luck had somehow turned against him. He found Stewart, perspiring and spattered with grease, working over the motor which was fastened to a framework.

"Hello, Stewart—in trouble?"

"Yes. I tested this motor and found that the spark plug was cracked."

"No spare plugs?"

"Yes, somewhere, but I can't find them."

He spun the fly-wheel. The little motor coughed weakly and stopped.

"I'm afraid it's no use," Stewart concluded in disgust.

"Never mind. We can go another time," Bernard consoled him.

"Nothing of the sort! I'll take the large canoe and four paddlers."

Bernard could not refuse; neither could he make objection to Sakki, who took his place at the stern.

Canvas chairs in the bow accommodated the two white men. It was daylight now. A mist lying low over the lagoon left visible the tops of palm-trees on the far bank.

"We couldn't have picked a better day." Stewart lighted a cigaret as he spoke.

"Yes, it seems almost cool."

"We'll be warm enough by noon; don't worry!"

As the canoe pointed its nose toward the river's mouth Sakki's deep, mellow voice broke the stillness:

"*Guiieya—atsuh! Guiieya—atsuh!*"

The craft picked up speed.

Soon the mist completely lifted, and a golden sun lighted up the dense tangle of bush on the embankment. A network of arches was formed by the mangroves growing close to the water's edge. In and out of this maze birds flew, metallic, red, blue—a riot of moving color. At the canoe's approach large lizards scurried away.

Bernard, keyed to a pitch of excitement, imagined each piece of floating driftwood to be the snout of crocodile and hippo.

"See there!" he exclaimed for the fourth time.

Stewart nodded. The crew brought the canoe silently forward. Bernard raised the rifle. The object disappeared.

"Crocodile—hard to get!" said Stewart.

And when walls of twined bamboo closed the river allowing only a few openings for canoe passage, he explained:

"Native fish-nets. The partitions form chambers and the pointed bamboos keep the fish from getting back to open water."

On these barrages were many birds—blue, gray, pure white.

"The white ones are aigrets," Stewart went on. "But the feather's not on them this time of year."

Sakki grunted. They turned. He pointed to a golden eagle circling above them, watching for prey. Bernard took the shot. The bird fell like a plummet, and was picked up by Sakki, who ended his struggles by a well-directed machete blow. The crew were open in their admiration.

The hot sun touched Bernard's hands with fire. Midstream glistened mirror-like; near the shore the river was deep blue with green streaks here and there. At noon they pulled into a cove, left the canoe, and reached the main land by creeping along a fallen tree-trunk.

Bernard was hungry. He ate rather heavily of the preserved tongue, washed down with stout. Stewart suggested that they rest a while, but Bernard was impatient. There might be game in the bush.

One of the natives, a skilful hunter, so Sakki vouched, led the way. Then came Stewart, followed by Bernard. Sakki brought up the rear. Two boys were left in the canoe. A narrow trail, so narrow that Bernard's shoulders brushed the bushes on either side, led them through thick undergrowth. Here and there a cluster of giant trees towered to the sky. The rank odor of wet vegetation filled the air, making breathing difficult.

At the first clearing the man in the lead turned to Stewart. Stewart whispered to Bernard:

"There's a bunch of trees ahead. Don't make any noise. There might be some black monkeys."

Sakki made no more noise than the guide, but the two white men, in spite of caution, crushed twigs under foot and to the expert bush ear advertised their coming. The monkeys had taken cover in the dense branches. Bernard followed Stewart's example and squatted close to the ground hidden by the bush. The leader barked in perfect imitation of the monkey call.

Stewart was a little ahead of the others, off the trail, squatting behind a clump of bushes. Bernard could see the khaki shirt glued to the skinny back by perspiration. Now was the time. An accidental discharge of the shotgun. And that man, Sakki, he would not be able to do anything. He had no gun and he, Bernard, would still have a shell in the left barrel.

The white man raised his weapon. Over the bead he could see the place where the buckshot would go, just below the left shoulder. He would press the trigger. To his amazement he could not find the will power to shoot a man in the back. He lowered his gun.

Sakki was close by and yet had made no move to stop him. The black, Bernard reasoned, had seen enough white men to know that they were not able to shoot unfairly.

Sakki rolled his eyes toward the treetops. Bernard looked up, and at that moment Stewart fired. The monkey fell. Others took flight through the foliage.

"Never mind them," Stewart ordered as he came back to the trail. "We'll go farther and give you your chance, Bernard."

Sakki picked up the dead monkey, and they continued on their way.

TWO o'clock found them deeper in the bush. The salt meat had made Bernard thirsty, and he drained the last drop of water from his canteen. His tongue felt thick and heavy, but pride kept him from asking Stewart for his flask. His helmet gripped his throbbing temples in a band of steel. Strange how that sun sapped the energy out of one!

In astonishment he watched Stewart, who, despite his frail, wasted appearance, kept ahead of the others by a good fifty feet, never showing a trace of fatigue. How could he ask that chap for a drink!

His feet were burning now. The weight of his gun increased by the minute. The strap of his canteen cut into his shoulder, and thirst became a torment. He began to think of clear, cool water, of ice, of snow. Sakki had noticed his thirst and plucked leaves from a certain bush, indicating that Bernard should suck the juices.

At that moment he heard the soft murmur of running water. He quickened his step and came upon a little stream of water trickling across the path, not two inches deep. He fell on his knees and drank.

Sakki timidly touched his shoulder.

"No good!" he warned, shaking his head.

"It's all right. Mind your own business!" Bernard retorted, getting up.

He resumed the march feeling better.

At four Stewart turned back. They could make the canoe by sundown. The boys were loaded with game, and Stewart, with a quick glance at his companion, remarked that it had been a satisfying day.

For a while Bernard's iron will kept him going. The relief the water had given him soon vanished. Nauseated and dizzy he finally dropped behind. Once or twice he stumbled. Then he removed his helmet with a sense of relief. That talk of sunstroke was all nonsense. The sun was no hotter here than in other places. A lot of old women, these Coasters. Sakki came alongside, worried about his bare head, but Bernard indicated that he wanted no interference. Away ahead Stewart was whistling merrily.

They were only twenty minutes from the canoe when Bernard fell.

WHEN Stewart saw the limp form in Sakki's arms he bitterly reproached himself. He had sensed his assistant's aloofness, and a queer light in his eyes when he believed himself to be unobserved had often puzzled him. But he had formed a strong liking for Bernard. He should have realized that the hot sun and the rank smells of the jungle would prove too much for the outsider. True, he had noticed that Bernard felt the exertion. He had immediately turned back without telling the other his reason in order to avoid his humiliation.

He looked closer. Bernard's white face in repose was almost babyish, the bristly growth on his unshaven chin incongruous. A quick, sharp order, and a resting-place was made in the canoe. Slanting rays from the setting sun were still dangerous, and Stewart prepared a shelter for the sick man's head with sticks and his thick canvas coat. The best and only thing to do was to get him back to the bungalow and in bed.

The men were silent, for they sensed their master's perturbation. Sakki was most anxious to help.

"Massa——"

"Yes, Sakki?"

"Dem white man he be foolish past small boy. He drink dem bush water."

Stewart was aghast. He had tried to impress Bernard with the danger of unfiltered, unboiled water.

"He take dem toppee off, too," added Sakki, tapping his head.

"Long time?"

"Yes. From dem big trees and then he fall!"

To expose his head to the murderous sun! The man must have been mad! If he had fever in his system this would bring it to a crisis.

The trip down-stream was a nightmare to Stewart. As the light decreased the form of his assistant seemed to shrink, to grow smaller. Optical illusion, of course. Things take on an unreal aspect at night. The blacks were not singing, and only the swish of the paddles broke the silence. Night fell completely. Occasionally Sakki would grunt an order for a change of direction. He knew the river well and had the eyes of a cat.

A feeling of overwhelming depression came over Stewart as he realized his helplessness. The doctor, he knew, was over a hundred miles away in Grand Bassam. Too many white men had died in his bungalow already. Yes, Bernard would probably die. Then he, himself, would go. Two more uncared for graves in the white man's cemetery, dug in the loose sand with tumbled, worm-eaten crosses and the sea-crabs burrowing into the tombs.

He pulled himself together. He must try to save Bernard.

"Make quick," he ordered sharply.

With mighty strokes the boat was swept forward. Little dancing flames, will o' the wisps, appeared over the mud flats among the sunken roots of the mangroves. Splashes alongside, fish or crocodile, impossible to tell. A single star was reflected in the dark water.

Under the prolonged strain Stewart's brain reeled. Men had gone mad here. With less cause. Would he, too? No, he would not. He must save Bernard. Was Bernard dead, already? He listened. He could not hear him breathe. Reaching forward, he seized a limp hand. It was hot, clammy. Every few minutes Stewart reached over.

Toward the end of the trip Bernard moved uneasily and muttered. He tried to throw himself out of the canoe. Stewart held him, and the boys shifted their weight to keep from overturning.

Even Sakki was not infallible. The canoe grounded on a sand bar and stuck, forcing the crew knee-deep in the murky water. Then, to make up for lost time, they exerted themselves to the utmost, skimming the craft with lightning speed over the dark surface of the quiet river. Millions of fireflies in the bush made patterns of light. Once, when the canoe passed a village, curious natives crowded on the bank, their forms outlined by fires behind. They called and the boatmen answered.

Again Stewart experienced the fantastic and grotesque emotions of a nightmare. Would they never reach Grand Lahou?

He must have fallen asleep. Sakki was calling him.

"Massa! Massa!"

He looked up with a start. They were close to the village. His house servants were in groups on the landing, carrying lanterns. Bernard still muttered senselessly. The tom-toms were beating in the market-place. As the canoe slipped alongside the wharf and Stewart jumped ashore, he was aware of dancers around the big fires. It must be late.

Sakki carried Bernard. Stewart led the way. They undressed him and put him to bed, wrapped in blankets. He was burning with fever and more volubly delirious. Stewart watched for the dreaded black vomit which meant black water fever and almost certain death. Hardly any use, fighting then. But if it were malaria quinin was the thing. More than that he could do nothing.

The tom-toms kept time to Bernard's labored breath. The —— things brought bad luck. Every time they beat something went wrong. Now this man, young, strong, with life before him, would die. That's what they said—

"Die—die—die."

All the boasted sanitation of European governments could not make the West

Coast fit for the white man. They would always die here. And the black man? Every epidemic took toll in thousands. Like flies they dropped. And like flies they bred.

The only thing he could do was to give him quinin—a little quinin to keep him from slipping off. Even those who took the little white pellets sometimes died. Peters and Jackson. He called to mind a long list of men who had died in spite of quinin. That fellow Davis had flickered out like a lamp running low. Stewart had sat by his bed, and the tom-toms had been beating.

What filthy things the tom-toms were, worn and patched! The country here, too, was dirty and poor. Why should it not voice its threat through the tom-toms? No wonder men sought refuge in the Lord's Vineyards. He thought of the table on the veranda and the drinks—the squat bottle of gin. Last Saturday night at this time— No, he must take care of Bernard.

But what was the use of doing anything if the tom-toms said he would die? The first night he had heard the things, 'way back when he had just arrived from England, they had called him a fool—fool—fool. They spoke all languages. French, English, Spaniards, all ran from them to the Vineyards. The Dutchman, who had hanged himself—they had urged him on. They spoke all tongues. He must get away from them. He got up to fetch the gin.

Bernard groaned.

Stewart stepped back to the bed silently. The sick man's face was flushed with fever, and he had thrown the blankets off, exposing his fine shoulders. Stewart's shoulders had been like that once. The Coast did that to men, shrank them, shriveled them or killed them. Some lasted longer than others. Those not wrecked physically became mental derelicts. Billways was rugged and strong, but his soul was dead.

Bernard was talking again, rolling his head from side to side:

"Charlotte— Charlotte——"

Beads of perspiration sprang out on Stewart's forehead. Had he heard right, or was he, too, becoming delirious? He waited, motionless and tense. And when Bernard was quiet he touched him on the shoulder.

"Charlotte— Charlotte——"

Some men in Bernard's condition answered questions. Stewart leaned closer and half-opened his lips as if to speak. But why should he question him? He might know a woman of that name. There were thousands of "Charlottes" in the world. This was a weird coincidence, another torture devised for him by Fate. He must give the quinin, must do something to break up the fever, stop the sound of that name. He slipped a hand beneath the pillow, forced the pills between Bernard's lips and finally succeeded in getting him to drink.

"Charlotte—" Bernard continued to mumble.

Temptation whispered. Of course it was a mad idea, but why not relieve his mind, make sure.

"Charlotte—who?" he questioned with a shake in his voice.

"Charlotte Briggs, you fool—Charlotte —Charlotte——"

A STRANGE thing, all the snow on the ground and so hot. Queer waves of heat made everything come in threes. At first Bernard had thought there were three letters. No, he could not have survived three. The one letter had nearly crazed him.

What was that thumping noise—*tom-tom-tom!* Oh, yes, the train on the bumpers. Faster, faster! It couldn't travel fast enough to suit him. Then he became confused, worried, something about money. Perhaps he had lost what he had saved. It must be here somewhere, maybe on the floor. No, in the rack with the glasses. Three glasses. Everything in threes——

Three changes. The train at Liverpool, the underground, a cab. He had dreamed everything that had happened since. He had even dreamed that a man called Stewart had made love to Charlotte and taken the money—pound notes sterling—a long time to save it. What a hideous nightmare! Like the dreams he used to have when he read a fairy tale before going to bed. That's where he got the three. Three wishes; three giants; three pieces of gold. And yet——

He tried to think sanely. No, his first impression was right. Stewart had taken the money. What of it? They could start again. He would borrow. They would go back to Canada.

And then that strange look in her eyes.

The eyes came nearer. The face grew indistinct. Gray waves of mist where her hair had been now formed strange shadows. All eyes now, no shape or form to the rest. He was backed up against a wall, two hands, one behind his head, the other with a thumb on his throat, were choking him, stifling him. Then the apparition turned and fled.

A wave of anger swept him. Why had he been afraid? He had faced death before. Why should he be afraid of Stewart? Yes, it was Stewart! There must be a way to find him and when he found him he'd know. The eyes were gray with lids that drooped, and his thin mouth was twisted in a smile. Wherever he was, he was laughing. Whatever he had done to Charlotte, she still loved him, waited for him. That was like a woman. Because she had loved him, she had given him the money. And he had taken it and gone.

The money was nothing—a lot of money in the world. He mustn't get to thinking of it or he would start hunting again, on the floor, on the wall. When he did that he was out of his head. Yes, he must keep sane, go about things calmly. If he could only summon the energy to move, to get up and to out and find that office building.

Something was holding him down, cool, gentle hands. Not Charlotte. She loved some one else. Not Sakki. Black skin would be rough. Yes, he must get up. Nothing could keep him from finding Stewart. He grew angry at the restraint. He twisted and turned, yet touched nothing. Then he cursed, but heard no sound of his own voice. All senses stilled, yet a maddening consciousness of being alive, of being Robert Bernard. Perhaps he was not alive——

He remembered now. He had taken off his helmet. Sakki warned him. The sun was hot. What nonsense about drink being the gateway to the Lord's Vineyards! There was only one way. Death. He had found it. Why had he not found peace? He tried to summon sanity. Surely being dead did not keep one from thinking clearly. Why had he not found peace?

Why did he still want to go out on the hot street and search for the office building? He laughed aloud. There were no questions to trouble one in the Lord's Vineyard. Here it was cool. Not the coolness that had come from over the mountains around Alberta, but a strange mental coolness—abstraction, indifference—a sixth sense. He let himself be carried out into the mists.

STEWART pieced together the jumbled delirium. There was no doubt about it, Bernard, too, had been tricked by Charlotte. Only she had exiled him in Alberta, to save the money, perhaps, for their wedding! And he had received a letter telling him the money was gone. And he had journeyed on to England to find out the truth. What sort of a lie had she made up? Convincing enough to send Bernard to the Coast in search of the man whom he thought had wronged him.

Stewart leaned over the bedside and watched the drawn face, now alight with fever madness, now relaxed in exhaustion. Bernard must live to hear the explanation. There in his desk were letters that would spread it all out before him like a map, clear up the last detail of the intrigue. Once when the pulse beat lowest Stewart summoned every ounce of his will power in an attempt to call Bernard back, keep the spark burning.

Shortly after this Bernard lifted himself weakly on his elbow and muttered:

"—— that nigger!"

"Be quiet, old chap."

"He's always around. I can't get a chance at that shrunken ape."

A frown came between Stewart's brows as he listened.

"His buckle—the moonlight shines on it. Easy—a bullet in the stomach—that would make him twist——"

He remembered that night. They were sitting on the veranda—

"Didn't he take everything I had when I wasn't there—stabbed me in the back? Yes—why not? Accidents will happen. I'm not used to hunting."

Revelation upon revelation.

For days he had been living in the house with a man who had one thought in his mind—murder! That's why he wanted to undertake the hunting trip. But why hadn't he carried out his plan? Sakki had followed at the rear. How simple for Bernard to forget the safety catch on his hammerless, and stumble. As he said—accidents will happen. What had restrained him? Hesitancy to shoot a man in the back? If Bernard hadn't been taken ill what would have happened?

The air in the room seemed close and stifling. Stewart got up, his lips tightening in a grim line, and went out on the veranda. Habit carried him to the table where the drinks were always kept. He poured out a glass of gin. As he put the square-faced bottle back in its place, he noticed that his hand shook. As Bernard's hand had trembled that night here on the veranda! He recalled now—the other had hardly been able to lift the glass to his lips. Shortly after that his hand had gone into his right coat pocket. Then Sakki had come in.

Stewart reached for another drink and tried, this time, to keep his fingers steady. Why could he not summon the will power to control that exasperating physical weakness?

Yes, Sakki had come in. Always Sakki had stepped between them. How strange that in spite of his—Stewart's subsonscious desire to die, his lack of courage to do it quickly, neatly—death should be stalking him and chance should intervene. In spite of his shaking fingers he was alive, his heart beat and he could think clearly. Charlotte had made a dupe out of both of them, had told Bernard some lie that had sent him to the Coast with murder in his heart, an automatic in his pocket.

Antipathy toward Bernard had suddenly left Stewart, left him cold and shaking. He sat down and looked at the matter squarely. Charlotte had the power to drive a man to drink madness, to thoughts of suicide. She had driven him so far that he could never get back, never give up his gin and bitters, never go home. And yet he blamed Bernard. There was only one person to blame—Charlotte.

"What a woman!" he laughed shortly. "Where did she find the power to break two men's hearts!"

And how could he say there were only two? Surely there was other game in the bush for a woman of her beauty, her cleverness, her total disregard for consequences to others. Consequences! She would go on doing the same unless something were done to punish her, teach her a lesson. He got up and paced the veranda like a caged lion. Each time he passed the bed-room door he listened to the regular breathing within.

Bernard was asleep. He would get well. And then— Both victims of the same badger game could they not pick up life together again, pick it up at the point of their discovery of the truth, work together in a united effort to find her, make her pay—

It was daylight now and a warm breeze had lifted over the lagoon. A drunken native passed by the gate carrying a tom-tom.

"The dirty, silly thing!" he muttered and laughed as he poured out a glass of gin.

The things that had driven him to the edge of insanity had suddenly lost their meaning, were unimportant. A native dance was just a native dance. Yes, he would pick up life again and take Bernard along. Their lives had lost aim; they would find another—to bring justice, to even up the score, to prevent others from falling into the same trap. The game had just started. Charlotte had had her deal. It was now their turn.

No—the last word had not been said.

II

THE rain beat on the roof. A thin fog from the hot vegetation outside seeped into the room and formed a haze around the hissing acetylene lamp, about which the night insects fluttered with whirring wings. The merciless, gut-twisting climate of West Africa was at its most redoubtable phase, when black water fever stalks about in search of the weakened Coaster and malarial germs hide in the diminutive pads of the mosquitoes that breed and multiply in every festering pool of brackish water stenching the air about the miasmatic lagoons.

The peculiar moist heat of the rainy season pressed the air like a tepid poultice on the skins of the two men seated at dinner. In the intervals between showers the intermittent puffs of night wind brought various smells from the native huts.

Fred Stewart laid down his knife and fork. In his plate the greasy sauce was slowly solidifying around the sausages, turning gradually from a deep red to a sickly green as the preservative from the "mother" can reasserted itself.

Through the open windows of the veranda Bernard looked out at the glistening streams of water spouting down from the clouds amassed in sinister chaos above the palm-trees, so low as to appear within the reach of the hand. In the half-light of early evening the lead-colored sea, grayed by the first shadows of approaching night, broke on the beach in a fringe of light-catching foam, fantastic, unreal, depressing. The thunder of the combers seemed muffled by the very opaqueness of the atmosphere.

In spite of the gloomy face of nature Bernard had a feeling of elation. For the first time in months he felt completely sane. The racking spell of malaria had held but brief sway. Then quinin had bolstered his strong constitution. The strength flowing back into his limbs, the sense of physical well-being after utter collapse was exhilarating. The fight had been won by Stewart that night a week ago, and with the fever had gone the torturing obsession for Charlotte.

His reaction to Stewart's revelation had been a feeling of relief, of complete peace. He felt indifferent toward her, at most a cold resentment, not even resembling hatred which is close kin to love. Agreement with Stewart for her chastisement was caused more by his inborn sense of the fitness of things than by the thought of personal revenge. The hot wave of murderous anger had ebbed away, leaving a determined desire to even things up, but resembling his former passion as a pool resembles a torrent.

Yes, his love for Charlotte was gone, dead. Within him arose another sentiment, gratitude—gratitude to Stewart for the gentle care during his illness, the invariable kindness, silent encouragement and a last great proof of unselfish friendship.

The day after Bernard's recovery, the two had discussed the case frankly and come to the conclusion that Charlotte should not be allowed to seek out further victims. They must go back to England, they had agreed, within reach of her, and then work out a suitable plan for punishment. There was one big difficulty: Bernard was bound by a two-years' contract to Kingsley & Co. Stewart, with his own money and without ostentation, purchased his release. This skinny chap, with the drawn yellow cheeks, who drank more gin than was good for him, was kinder and more understanding than any pulpit-thumping parson herding souls to salvation. And he was all man, Bernard knew.

Yet he felt a certain awe of him—an emotion that amounted almost to fear. The shifting of Stewart's brooding thoughts from his own plight to a veritable thirst for revenge had rendered him almost a maniac on the subject. He spoke of little else, and the morbid energy formerly used in his work now went into the plans of action against the girl.

There was something formidable about the smoldering determination, quiet and composed on the surface, something as irresistible and unavoidable as the changing of the seasons—inhuman, elemental. A machine had been put into motion the cogs of which would grind away until the purpose was accomplished, would be stopped by nothing but destruction. Bernard had the sensation of one who watches a boulder, released from the crest of a hill, rush down with increasing speed, terrible in its potential power.

The years of solitude had given Stewart the capacity for deep thought. In his patient, relentless mind emotions were bottled up, emotions which could not be poured out, but must make exit by explosion. Self-repression had generated a force, which called upon for action, would answer with a power beyond the capabilities of the average man. Stewart's thin hands, in Bernard's eyes, embodied his character: thin, wrinkled as parchment, the blue veins showing through the skin; powerful, with the grip of a vice, they were skillful beyond imagination. The same instinct that led Stewart straight to the trouble in a gas motor would lead him now, on the right track, to the woman.

But Bernard worried for fear that his new-found friend, torn from the niceties of everyday civilization and respect for the law, with manhood memories of only the War and the African Coast, might go too far. Would not the exile of loneliness and suffering, the knowledge of an aged body in his early twenties, make him merciless? And so Bernard followed Stewart's every move with apprehension.

At that very moment, while Stewart contemplated the coagulation of the tinned meat, Bernard knew that his mind was far away from Grand Lahou, that he did not hear the pelting of the rain, had forgotten the smells, the heat—everything. Thinking, thinking, endlessly. And Stewart was too far above the average to think of the obvious. He would think, think on, until he put his finger on the weak spot, the controlling aim of the woman's life. And then, without a qualm, he would smash her, as she had smashed him.

Once Stewart had muttered something about an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. When a Coaster mumbles to himself something usually happens. The climate, for all its debilitating effect, leads a man to disregard consequence. A blind man does not fear the dark.

"Say, Bernard—" Stewart spoke suddenly, then paused.

In the brief moment before he resumed Bernard was conscious of palm leaves rattling together in the compound and the distant roar of the surf, an accompaniment strangely in keeping with Stewart's mood.

"Our friend, Miss Briggs—she's after money."

Bernard nodded.

"She'd do anything to get it——"

"Yes—" Bernard agreed.

"Queer, I hadn't thought of it before. Perhaps a remnant of my illusion—or vanity. Yes, that's the weak spot in the armor. She'd do anything to get a lot of money." With his fork he turned over one of the sausages. "You know I'm fed up on these—been having them for four years. Somehow they remind me of Miss Briggs."

Bernard gave him a quick searching look. Perhaps—a touch of the sun, the continuous brooding, or the drink——

"No, I'm not mad," Stewart went on calmly enough. "These sausages look like sausages, taste fairly good, and yet they're not real—they're artificial, preserved. Charlotte looks like a woman, has all the exterior qualities, and yet she's not real, not the same sort of being our mothers were—is she?"

"She is not."

"The veneer once peeled off, she's spoiled, rotten. The preservative reasserts itself. Her greed for money shows up like this green stuff." Stewart slowly agitated the sauce, then resumed. "Her greed for money—that's our line. One is punished through the sin one commits——"

"But we can't take her money—we have no proof. And we could publish the story in every paper in the British Islands, and there would still be enough fools to work for her. Beauty is a dangerous weapon when cleverly handled."

"I'm thinking—there must be a way—" Stewart asserted.

"I'm afraid this situation would stump Solomon himself!"

"His judgment could hardly be trusted—he surrounded himself with women," Stewart answered dryly, and from the grim twinkle in his eyes Bernard knew that he had found the key. "We're on the wrong tack," he went on. "So far Miss Briggs has made us travel—you especially."

Bernard laughed shortly as he visualized the miles he had covered through Charlotte Brigg's machinations.

"She'd disturbed our lives considerably," Stewart went on. "An eye for an eye—travel to pay for travel." He paused, enjoying Bernard's eager curiosity. "This is the place for her."

"Have her—come down here!" The exclamation was caused by a swift vision of Charlotte's well-groomed form seated at the table over insipid fish, stale goat meat or greasy sausages.

"Yes—here."

Bernard nodded in agreement knowing that the full plan would soon be told to him. In fact he was relieved. Here on the Coast was less danger of catastrophe than in England. Nothing could stop Stewart. He must go on. There are hurts which must be healed by strong measures. One should not hesitate to remove a cancer. And this case needed a major operation, a ruthless procedure. And the audacity of the plan appealed to him. If it could be safely worked— Stewart had lighted a cigaret and was now preparing himself a gin and bitters.

"Charlotte doesn't know you're here, I believe," he said.

"No. When I came from Alberta she tossed me aside like a squeezed lemon. She had all my cash, the——"

"Keep that to tell her," Stewart suggested gently. "My idea is to send her a letter informing her of Fred Stewart's death. He left a will disposing of several thousand pounds and property under the condition that she come to the Coast to arrange various small matters, debts, etc. She is not the only beneficiary. The will, we'll say, names Charlotte Briggs and another, the division of the property to be decided upon by the executor, a fellow named Bradley. That's so she'll not delay or await advice and help. We'll make it nine thousand pounds. Have you noticed odd numbers look less booky?"

"But where did Fred Stewart get all this money?" Bernard asked.

Stewart smiled quietly and followed the cigaret smoke with his eyes as it curled around the flare of the lamp.

"Did you ever hear of Abase Amua?"

"The old bird with garters and no pants who comes into the shop to buy gin by the case?"

"Yes. We've that in common—a liking for gin. He's a timber-cutter. Mahogany. There's big money in the game—for a white man. Amua has excellent cuttings, gets his native labor cheap, but—when he gets his wood down, the sharp fellows from the purchasing companies buy it at half-price. And they deduct the expenses and, believe me, the accounts are padded. Boss Stevedore's wife's new dress is itemized. Nothing wrong in it—business. One or two of them act differently, I've heard. But I've never met them here.

"Suppose Amua comes to me with a proposition. Instead of operating under his own name he officially sells his cuttings to me. I'm a white man. I get good prices. He pays me fifteen per cent. commission. On the last two years sales this would have amounted to at least ten thousand pounds. And who is to tell our good friend that I didn't start two years ago?"

"Fine—but there's one objection. You know what Charlotte looked like to us in England where there are thousands of white women. Imagine the tonic effect she'd have here. The administrator, for instance. He'd shave off his whiskers to please her and order the Guardes Cercle to shoot us down if we annoyed her—would hand the whole town over to her to have and to hold."

"Yes, he would."

The two smoked in silence, discouraged, for the plan had rattled down about their ears. Bernard felt as a man in the dark who has seen a ray of light only to have it shut off, leaving him groping. Grand Lahou was no safer for them than England. A white woman would have the protection of every one. Charlotte would leave triumphantly, would even force them to pay her passage. A contract to come to the Coast entails a return fare. The plan was out, unless——

"Did you ever put this scheme to Amua?"

"No," Stewart returned with a quick ok at the other. "A white man doesn't approach a native to form an association—in the usual course of things."

"But this is rather unusual."

"What do you mean?"

"Where is his cutting?"

"Up the Bandama," Stewart's eyes sparkled as he read Bernard's meaning. "There's a house there. It's lonely—no white men for fifty miles, and those are sleepy Frenchmen overseeing native labor. Little chance of interference. Even our determined friend would scarcely hoof it alone back to the river with stray Korokos fresh from the Sudan roaming the trails. By Jove, Bernard, you've hit it!" He turned and called sharply, "Sakki, *blah!*"

Sakki, who had been waiting on the veranda, appeared and stood motionless before his master. A new era of prosperity had come to the Kroo-boy. He wore white drill trousers, sleeve garters and a silver wrist watch, the latter a gift from Bernard as a reward for his watchfulness. Sakki, dog-like in his faithfulness, had sensed the friendliness between the two men and became less obtrusive. He had even found the spark plugs of the motor.

"You savvy dem big black man, Amua—who be for village today?"

"Yassah."

"You go talk him so, 'Massa Stewart he want look you one time.' "

"Yassah, massa."

Sakki left the room with a quick, soft stride and was lost to view in the darkness outside.

The night had shut down completely. Brief flashes of electric phosphoresence glimmered on the sea. The sky was so black even the shapes of the trees were not visible. In the tunnel blackness of the compound rain drops spattered on the leaves with tiny crunching noises that sounded from everywhere at once.

Bernard nervously drummed on the table with his finger-tips. Stewart was brooding again—thinking, thinking. Bernard felt as if they two were alone in the world, that the bungalow was the center of the universe, the rain the protecting wall that kept away intruders. Intermittently Stewart's glass clinked as he poured out a glass of gin. Then a match flared up, casting a yellowish reflection on his face made livid by the pale acetylene glare. A tiny white lizard, friendly visitor of the night, crawled along the ceiling, snatching at mosquitoes and flies.

No, they were not alone. Other lives went on. Their problem concerned the rest of creation as little as did the lizard's occupation concern a white man—a mere speculative interest, then forgetfulness. He puffed slowly at his cigaret, sipped at a glass of port and waited. Chief Abase Amua held their plans in the palm of his horny black hand.

FROM down the road that led to the native village, a light swung in a small arc, sometimes disappearing, twinkling like a huge gold star in the night. Then the creak of the hinges at the gate of the compound; a mumble of voices as the watchman questioned the visitor; the deep tones of Sakki; the guttural voice that Bernard recognized as Abase Amua's, breaking into a high-pitched whine at the end of the phrase; a shuffling patter of bare feet and sandals on the veranda, and Amua appeared in the doorway, Sakki looming in the background.

Amua, though fallen from a high estate and clothed in semi-civilized garb, still maintained a dignity of bearing that can only be born of ancestral leadership. His father had fought the invading white men and got licked. Amua did business with them—and got licked. But his pride was not diminished. His ludicrous attempt to keep up traditions could be only pathetic to the understanding. There was something of fallen majesty about Amua for all his bulbous nose, his plaintive intonations in speech, his wide grin.

Stewart got up and crossed the room to meet him. He shook hands twice, according to the native custom, then introduced Bernard ceremoniously. After offering the native a cigaret he poured for him a tall glass of gin, which the chief gulped down as one would drink water. Placing the empty glass on the table, Amua turned to the two white men.

"He be good," he said. "Now we talk."

Stewart laid out his plan, pointed out the many advantages of a white representative. Bernard listened in admiration. The distorted bush English phrases took on new color, created living pictures as with skilful emphasis the speaker described the prosperity that would come to Abase Amua and his tribe; better huts for the laborers, a large white bungalow in which the chief would live, the consideration he would receive from white and black alike; he might even send his sons to Freetown for an education. As the possibilities dawned on Amua he clucked his tongue and screwed up his face in approval.

"And you—what do you want, eh?" he questioned, looking at Stewart curiously.

"Money," Stewart said shortly.

"How much?" Though often bested by buyers Amua was no fool. He would not assent to anything even from a man of Stewart's known integrity, until he was sure of his ground.

"Fifteen per cent."

"He be good," Abase Amua declared gravely.

"And I want to live in your bungalow on your last cutting with Mr. Bernard."

"That be good," agreed the Chief. "Tomorrow we go to administrator and fix up papers, eh?"

"Very well."

"Money be bad thing," Amua explained. "Sometimes a man be fine too much, but if there be plenty money—" he shook his head.

"Absolutely. You're a philosopher, Abase!"

"No. I be timber-cutter."

He got up, folded his cloth carefully, grunted in farewell and went out into the rain.

"Well, that part is settled," Stewart resumed. "Up there no one will interfere."

Yes, in the bush the white man is "Massa" of all he surveys and the natives question none of his actions. Bernard had been warned by Stewart to pay no heed when the Kroo-boys lectured their wives with a barrel-stave. On the Coast a woman is a man's property. The laborers would be too ignorant to notice. The house servants were devoted to Stewart and would not talk."

"Sakki!" Stewart called. "Go to the office and get dem machine that talks with hands."

A few minutes later Stewart sat down before the typewriter, and his fingers flew over the keys. When he had finished he handed the letter to Bernard.

"See if it's all right, old man," he said, and rose and fumbled about among some papers on his desk. "I'm after Bradley's signature," he explained. "He went out with black water a year ago."

Bernard returned the letter to him with an approving nod.

"In six weeks she ought to be here," Stewart said quietly.

Bernard saw the muscles of his face tighten, his nostrils become pinched, and he felt uneasy about the outcome of the plan. And yet he could not object. Stewart was the first to be considered. Above all he must not be allowed to go to England.

Stewart stamped and sealed the letter.

* * *

THROUGH the open port-hole the sun streaked with a rectangle of light the center of the passenger saloon, touched with a high light the long tables and red plush cushions of the seat and lighted up with sparkles of gold the blond hair of Charlotte Briggs as she bent over to seal the letter she had just been writing.

Then she rose gracefully and made her way to the deck. To the west small fleecy clouds followed one another in the slight wind like sheep at pasture, in regular layers from the zenith to the horizon line, where sea and sky merged into a gray-blue shimmering haze. And on the land side the houses and trees of Grand Lahou were outlined against the burnished blue of the heavens with the precise strokes and lines of an etching, the colors and tints both bold and mellow. So absurdly clear and near in the atmosphere of early morning, the little settlement resembled the painted back drop in a theater.

Charlotte gave but a casual glance to the panorama before her.

The rail felt hot to her hands as she made her way to the waist of the ship. The officers were grouped there. As she stepped down the companionway she knew that they admired her lithe figure clad in cream-colored pongee, and her golden hair shone to advantage in the green shadow of her helmet. She would manage to keep cool and comfortable even under the blazing sun that melted the blue-green of the water into a polished mirror.

As she took her place in the mammy-chair, that was to swing her to the surf boat she smiled at the men about her, and each thought the smile addressed to himself. She handed the letter to the captain with the request that it be mailed on the ship's return to Liverpool. The tanned, gray-haired master bent in an awkward bow and gave her the assurance that he would attend to the matter personally.

The chief officer signaled, and the donkey-man started his engine. The chair rose upward, twenty feet above the deck of the *Axim* where it balanced in a half-circular motion. Charlotte looked down to wave a last farewell, the boom swung over the side and she felt herself gently lowered to the waiting boat. The big negro in the stern came to meet her and assisted her to a center seat. The mammy-chair swung back. The crew paddled away.

Far up, over the railing of the ship, masculine eyes strained after her. But she did not turn. They were in the past—of no more use to her. The future was ashore, where she was to meet Bradley.

She wondered what sort of man he would prove to be. His letter had been too brief and business-like to give indication. The boat heaved on the waves, passed from the deep hollows between rollers to the crests, from which Grand Lahou was visible, to sink again into another green valley, many feet from the tops of the racing water.

Charlotte wondered how she could have so miscalculated Stewart's capabilities. He had proved a success after all. And through her lack of perspicacity she had almost lost the money. Resentment took possession of her—resentment that Stewart should not have left her everything.

But Bradley, the executor, would really have things in his own hands. Her charms would not fail her. All men were alike in their conceit, their absolute faith in their perfect worthiness. The executor might be an old, hard-boiled chap, but a few judicious compliments would swing him to her side.

Engrossed in her reflections, the sullen roar of the surf, the caution of the steersman as he approached the line of flying spray, carried no message to her.

A tremendous wall of green water, crested with foam, running toward the beach like a tidal wave, passed under the boat with the thunderous crash of a cataract. The craft dropped several feet into the trough with a reverberating smash that threw the paddlers forward from their perches on the gunwale.

"Bete—bete! Whoooo!"

The words of the steersman conveyed no meaning to her, but the tone was alarming, warned of impending catastrophe. The crew had strained to their paddles, grunting in united effort.

She looked over the bow.

The roller was breaking. A premature

fall of water threatened to shoot the boat into the hollow with thousands of tons of water above to crash down upon it. She had a brief vision of the steersman making frantic efforts to shift the course of the boat and gain a few seconds. But the oar snapped with a loud report. The paddlers leaped to the side and jumped over board, their bodies flashing for an instant in the sun. A maelstrom of foaming water——

She kicked off her pumps—she was a good swimmer—and plunged deeply. Blinded, gasping, unable to cope with the swirling, pounding current that tore at her loosened hair, twisted her body until she lay limp, she felt herself lost. A thousand thoughts flashed through her mind. Although her lungs seemed about to burst she held her breath, tried to bring herself to the surface.

The next instant she felt something beneath her, tangible, human. Free from the water, she opened her mouth and the air rushed in. Weak from exhaustion and fright, she clung to the broad black back. A few minutes more, and she saw beneath her two muscular legs, more like columns than human limbs, around which the water swirled with the back wash.

Perched high on the shoulders of the giant steersman, she was at length carried to firm dry sand.

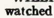
"You savvy water past fish!" the black exclaimed in admiration.

Realizing that he might be useful later, she managed a smile.

"What is your name, boy?"

He saluted with an open hand and answered—

"My name be Sakki, missy."



"WILLIAM BRADLEY" had watched the landing of the surf-boat. He now approached the water-line with slow, dragging steps, perhaps weakness, perhaps the hangover from a fever spell. That he feared the sun was evident. He wore a large toppee that protected the back of his neck as well as his face, and dark glasses to mitigate the glare of light that shimmered up from the sand in wavering sheets. His beard was long, and his mustache, streaked with gray, hung down limply from the corners of his mouth. His open shirt showed a muscular but wrinkled neck, tanned by long exposure.

As he walked he cut with his stick at the fiddler crabs disturbed by his canvas boots. He removed his pipe, and his teeth showed brownish from the excessive use of tobacco.

Joining a group of boatmen, he pushed his way through the wet black bodies and cast a casual glance at a native stretched on the sand. The man was dead. A boat, weighing several tons, has a crushing effect when it turns over; an accident common enough to the beach. Bradley shrugged his shoulders and turned, to come face to face with Charlotte Briggs, who had recovered sufficiently from her near-drowning to approach and inquire as to the cause of the excitement.

"What is it?" she questioned.

Bradley made way for her that she might see. The mangled body elicited but a slight shudder from the woman.

"Too bad," she murmured, and turned to the white man. "I expected a Mr. Bradley to meet me."

"I'm William Bradley—and this is Miss Briggs?"

"What is left of her after a ducking in your exhilarating surf!" she answered, and extended her hand.

He grasped her white fingers cordially.

"I can only apologize and express my extreme pleasure at meeting you, Miss Briggs."

Her laughter tinkled, and he marveled at the cold self-possession in her blue-gray eyes.

FRED STEWART was swept by conflicting emotions; satisfaction that she had not recognized him and the overwhelming certainty of his physical change. For the first time he realized what the Coast had done to him. Although he was strong, stronger no doubt than on his arrival, to all outside appearances he was an old man. And because of her! The momentary feeling of weakness that had been his when he saw her thrown into the water left him now, and the cold, almost impersonal hatred came back.

AS CHARLOTTE BRIGGS walked by Bradley's side toward the lagoon she realized, for the first time, how remote was this place from the civilization she had known.

The pitiless glare of the sun brought out the squalidity of native life. Fat babies played in filth, their little stomachs swollen from too much boiled rice. Old women, their wrinkled, sickly, gray-brown skin hanging from their shoulders in loose folds, pounded corn in wooden pots while they smoked short-stemmed clay pipes that filled the air with the acrid smoke of wet tobacco. Others wrapped the prepared corn paste in wet leaves, binding the package with grass strings.

In sharp contrast with feminine industry, the men loafed aimlessly; strutted about with powerful, loose-limbed, self-confident strides; slept on the thresholds, mouth agape, revealing ivory white teeth.

The primitive scene reminded the white woman of animal life. Shelter, food, the ultimate ambition of these people. No—for there, on the diminutive veranda of a hut built in imitation of a white man's bungalow, two men haggled, in loud voices, over a heap of silver pieces. The poison of greed had found its way into the native village.

Charlotte Briggs would have been shocked had she been told that the avarice of these blacks was as justifiable as her own.

She glanced around. In the distance the *Axim* was still in sight but as far out of reach as if in her dock at Liverpool. Bradley walked by her side silently, his eyes on the ground, his unlighted pipe between his teeth.

She had a passing fancy that his cheek would feel like cardboard to the touch, or like a drum-head, perhaps, so tightly was it stretched over the bony structure of the face. His hands hung limp at his side, the knuckles standing out in lumps, the blue veins swelling under the tanned skin. A detail struck her—the whiteness of the last knuckle which had been out of the sun in the natural crook of the hand.

"How long have you been here, Mr. Bradley?" she inquired.

Bradley turned to her. Even through the dark glasses it seemed that his eyes burned holes in her face. He cleared his throat, yet, when he spoke, his voice was husky.

"Too long," he said shortly.

She saw opportunity for the first step in her campaign.

"I've heard the climate is very bad, and yet you don't seem to have felt it."

When he did not answer immediately she feared she had made a false step.

"Don't I?" he questioned, at last.

"No," she assured with a smile.

"I've taken care of myself," he explained. "Avoided all excesses."

All men were alike! She concealed a smile. Conversation concerning the peculiarities of the Coast was kept alive until they reached the lagoon. At sight of the long black motor-boat she exclaimed in admiration. The cleanliness of the craft denoted patient, persistent work—every cylinder clean, the brass fittings polished to mirror brightness. To her surprize she found her luggage already in the forward compartment.

"I had the customs well oiled," Bradley explained as he helped her into the boat, which was open the length but shaded by thick awnings.

In the stern Sakki grasped the tiller. Bradley conducted her to a deck chair in the bow.

"Cigarets, magazines, drinks," he said, pointing to a stand. "If you want anything let me know."

She thanked him profusely, and then—

"Are you going to leave me alone?"

"I must take care of the motor." He smiled, the sad smile of a man who had lost the habit.

"But I'd like to know about Fred."

"Not much to know. He died——"

"How?"

"Black water. Three days——"

"Where are we going now?"

"To my bungalow. His grave is near the compound."

"Did he suffer much?"

"Not from the fever—no." Bradley turned and went back to his motor.

Sakki's native assistant pushed the boat from the wharf with a long pole, Bradley sprung the fly-wheel, Sakki bent to the tiller, and the craft swung out into the lagoon. Bradley shifted the levers, and the speed increased.

Charlotte became vaguely uneasy. How strange for a man to leave her to her own devices when he could be in her company. She would not have minded sitting beside the motor. Yes, his tendency toward indifference was alarming. Perhaps, down here, all men would be the same, and her beauty, so valuable in England, would be of little use. She still had her wits, she reasoned, and her knowledge of men.

She picked up a magazine.

THE monotonous rumble of the motor, the swish of the muddy water alongside, hour after hour, the intangible impression that she had made a false move growing more definite as the miles increased between herself and the Coast—Charlotte Briggs gave up all pretense at reading.

With the sinking of the sun the tree shadows lengthened and darkened the smooth surface of the river, the ocher of the water and the blue-black shadows forming a striking background for splashes of scarlet and gold. Through open spaces in the foliage on the adjacent banks patches of russet light glowed, like the open windows of a dark and forbidding castle.

Native canoes, bearing fishermen or women with produce for the factories, flitted by silently. Flights of birds swept over the river, seeking roost for the night. The first breath of the night wind agitated the tops of the palms. Charlotte turned slightly and in the gathering dusk made out Bradley, motionless against the motor. Outlined sharply against a last bright patch of sky, Sakki sat in the stern, a hand on the tiller, a foot braced against the side. His assistant dozed at his feet, now and then mumbling a vague song.

She shivered.

The sun disappeared completely over the horizon leaving a broad band of crimson. The bush seemed to blaze for a moment, a myriad of embers lighting in the foliage, then one by one the fires winked out and the sky became violet. The forms of the three men in the boat were black now, weired, mysterious. Her distorted imagination pictured lurking dangers in the jungle along the bank.

"Mr. Bradley!"

"What can I do for you?"

"May I have a light?"

"Certainly."

The assistant went forward to put on the riding-lights. On one side a red patch illuminated the water, on the other a green. He then lighted a lantern, which he deposited close to her.

She lost herself in contemplation. The first star blinked out. Soon the whole sky was sprinkled with a fine luminous dust. Here and there a large star scintillated gravely. And when the moon rose, huge as a silver balloon, the water became milky, the shadows near the banks spangled with silvery reflections. The spaces between the trees now showed white as though the fierce fire that had been burning within them had cooled and left only the glow of hot metal.

Sakki suddenly lifted his voice in song, deep, pleasant, sometimes plaintive—

"I have bought me a woman—bought her with much money——"

The words were in French with a strange native accent.

He went on to describe the charms of the lady of his choice, the evil fate that would befall her should she incur his displeasure. Bradley spoke sharply. The song ended.

"I don't mind his singing, Mr. Bradley," she said.

Bradley assented with a gesture. Sakki resumed but in another vein, concerning a wild boar in the bush and the wise hunter. Charlotte could not help but smile when the singer's voice took on droll expression in keeping with the comedy of the lines. With a last loud outburst Sakki, shaking with laughter, described the hunter, back at home, eating bananas—

"And the boar is still alive—alive in the bush."

The motor stopped suddenly. Silence fell like a palpable thing over the entire world, as if a mysterious soft substance had muffled all sounds. Sakki leaned against the tiller. The boat turned and entered a tiny cove nestled in a patch of moonlight.

Perhaps two hundred feet from the shore, on the narrow strip of white sand that stretched back from the water line to the fringe of the bush, stood two huts. An odor of fetid decay of animal and vegetable life came from the bush. A yellow cur approached the shore, barking and capering, the distorted shadow showing immense on the beach in the moonlight. There was a certain cold and forbidding beauty about the place.

Sakki and his helper had jumped overboard waist-deep. Without even grunting in the effort they hauled the heavy boat upon the sand. Bradley made a landing and helped the woman ashore. In silence he led the way. The Senegalese watchman, picturesque in Arab garb, came forward, holding up one hand in salute.

"Everything is ready," he said in French, and indicated the hut.

The mud walls, the earth floor, the ceiling of twined bamboo were scrupulously clean.

A low table in the center offered a spotless cloth and dishes methodically disposed.

"Have we arrived?" Charlotte questioned.

"No, we stop here for chop. Then we trek to my bungalow about eight miles away."

"But isn't it dangerous—at night!"

"Safer than London. The dangers are more obvious. And you will go in a hammock. I have ten men to carry you in relays. We can make it in three hours."

Before she could question him further he left the hut and did not enter again until Sakki had come with the evening meal. Charlotte had had but a few biscuits at noon, and she helped herself generously to sausage. Bradley surveyed her with a tinge of amusement in his eyes.

"Allow me to introduce you to tinned sausages, the Coaster's friend!" he exclaimed with a ceremonious wave of the hand.

Glad that he had forsaken his reserve, Charlotte answered brightly—

"I love them!"

Charlotte, in her unnatural, half-masculine make-up, had the love of food strongly developed. Bradley poured for her a tall glass of red wine, mellow and velvety. With the warm suggestion of the spirits she regained her confidence, became audacious, decided to play her trump card. The worm in front of her would surely prove easy game.

"You seem so different from the men at home," she began.

"I do? How?" he questioned casually.

"More poise—a certain self-confidence."

"This country either makes a man self-confident or wrings him dry," he replied placidly.

"There is a quality in you I do so admire——"

She broke off and regarded Bradley mischievously from the corner of her eye.

He smiled and lifted the glass of gin with a half-embarrassed gesture. Her fears rolled back like a dead skin, leaving her old, old confidence firm and unattacked. She purposely avoided his glance when next he looked up. The silence lengthened. The wash of the water on the river bank came clearly to her ears.

"Are you never going to leave this awful place!" she said at last.

"I've nothing to go back to."

"You poor boy!" she crooned. "Not even a sweetheart to write to?"

"I had one!"

"Did she die?"

The next moment she apologized for the hurt she might have inflicted by touching his wrist with her finger-tips. Sympathy, the way to a man's heart——

"She married some one else."

"Let you come down here—then forgot you!" she exclaimed unbelievingly.

His nostrils suddenly became pinched. She could not read the expression in his eyes, for he had not removed his glasses. She knew, however, that he suffered. Before she could offer further sympathy he turned and left the room. It occurred to her to wonder why he still wore the sun-glasses.

Again the feeling of being remote from civilization came over. But she no longer wished to return. The warmth of the Bordeaux cheered her. And Bradley, the abandoned lover, would be easy game.

He gave signs of new-found devotion when, presently, he came to the door and announced that they would start on the last leg of the journey. He graciously assisted her into the hammock, a pole supporting a net seat carried by two natives, and spread for her comfort a leopard skin. She thanked him with a light tap on the sleeve, and his teeth gleamed for a moment in his bushy beard.

The caravan followed Sakki's lead through tangled undergrowth along a path scarcely two feet wide. Occasionally a halt was called to allow Sakki to hack a way through obstructing bush. The machete blows rang out sharply and echoed in the still night. Monkeys, disturbed from their perches, chattered and fled through the trees.

When the trails forked Sakki would call out in his sonorous voice for a change in direction. Native villages emerged in little clearings, spic and span in the moonlight with only the smells to remind one of their filth. The occupants straggled out to stare curiously at the procession with grunts of surprize when they became aware of a "white mammy."

Bradley, in the rear, a rifle in the bend of his elbow, smoked calmly as if strolling through a busy European thoroughfare. Under his self-satisfied, easy-going manner she suspected a steel-like quality. It would not be easy to slip away from Bradley's clutch when the time came. This was no soft, romantic youth to be paid with a compliment and a few kisses. Neither was he a doddering old man with an after glow of romance for a pair of blue eyes and a few gold strands of hair. No, he was a hard-boiled, flea-bitten Coaster.

But she could always hold him off with promises until her return to England, and there she would find protection, a man who could easily cope with a ruthless, skinny Coaster. The hammock swung to and fro and lulled her into a half-sleep. The shapes of the trees became indistinct, the gleaming backs of the carriers unreal. Charlotte contemplated a star above and drowsily made plans.

The star was her own. When she was back in England she would locate it again in the sky and would think of this night. Yes, the uncertainty, the fatigue would bring its own reward. With a large share of Stewart's fortune she would never again risk unpleasantness in her little semi-confidence game.

The star blinked out. A cloud passed over the face of the moon. The scenery melted into a solid wall of darkness. Only Bradley's cigaret glowed like a star. Her real star. Well, she would follow it until it burned out and fell into the abyss, as the glowing ember that Bradley at that moment pitched into the bush described a short parabola and disappeared.

"What time is it?" she called out, rousing herself from the lethargy into which she had fallen.

"Midnight," answered Bradley. "We've arrived."

Several huge trees, standing like sentinels, marked an open clearing and the end of the trail. The inevitable barking of dogs, the grunts of pleasure from the tired carriers, the babbling of native women come to meet their men, and Charlotte felt the hammock lowered. The ground whirled about her and but for Bradley's steady arm she would have fallen.

"You've had a hard day," he said. "Sakki's wife will show you to your quarters."

A stumpy little woman, with filed front teeth and tightly wound wool jutting from her head at various angles, stood near at hand. Giggling, she led the way to a hut where she conducted Charlotte to her room, furnished with a bed, a chair, a washstand. For the moment she regretted her spacious chamber in London.

But once on the cot under the mosquito netting everything melted into an immense forgetfulness. Her tired limbs relaxed, and she dropped off to sleep, a deep, dreamless slumber that did not admit for long the faint shouts of the carriers adjusting the matter of reward for the night's trip.

The morning sunlight flamed through the veranda jalousies, outlining the crevices between the walls. Her luggage was in the room. She opened the steamer-trunk and chose a becoming morning dress, intent on the business at hand, the complete melting of Bradley's reserve.

When she stepped forth she was for the moment taken aback by the primitive scene in the door-yard. The negroes, both men and women, were half-clad in native costume. Then the illusion was shattered. A native servant came forth from what was, no doubt, the kitchen. He carried a square-faced bottle of gin on a tray, and the skirt that hung from his waist was an opened flour sack with the familiar printing still visible, "Golden Flour."

She smiled. But there was business to be thought of.

She made her way to the bungalow and ascended the veranda steps. As she walked she further planned her course of action. Bradley's conceit was the obvious line of least resistance. She would soon be on her way down the river, leaving the hardened Coaster a little sadder, a little wiser.

Inside the room Bradley was seated at a table, his back toward the door. She observed that his shoulders were wider than she had thought, and that there was more vitality in his make-up than she had seen yesterday. At the sound of the screen door he turned. With a swift intake of breath she fell back against the wall.

Fred Stewart stood before her.

WITHOUT making a move Stewart watched the woman's surprize give way to sheer terror. The moment was full of satisfaction for him. That morning when he shaved he had endeavored to hold his shoulders straight, as he used to do in England. To complete the reconstruction of the old Stewart he had gone to his trunk for a long-forgotten tie and scarf-pin.

There he stood, a little thinner, years older. The excitement had given back some of the vibrancy of the old personality. He seemed broader, bigger, his old self, indeed, with the added touch of tanned skin and an evident depth of vision born of suffering.

And Charlotte had undergone an inverse process. One could not have called her beautiful at that moment with her lips curled back in terror. When at last she stood erect, made an attempt to compose herself, Stewart saw that one of her finger nails was broken and blood showed on the fleshy tip.

"It was you," she breathed.

She passed a moist hand over her forehead, and the cream-colored powder caked in ludicrous streaks. Her eyes, tearless, were full of frightened despair. Stewart's feeling for her was disgust rather than pity. He had thought too much of Charlotte's poise to imagine that her reaction would be so abject, that she would lose her nerve at the first blow.

And while he stared at her wordlessly she got up and came over to him.

Her voice was breaking.

"Oh, Fred, how happy I am—happy—happy——"

She was all smiles now and had found tears—tears of joy and pain, she would have him think.

He disengaged himself from her arms and went over to the table where he poured out a glass of gin. After a sip he placed the glass on the table, adjusted the cloth with careful fingers, lighted a cigaret, first offering her one, which she refused with a dumb gesture. He indicated a chair. She slumped into it. He himself, sat down. Crossing one leg over the other, he watched her cynically.

" 'There is a quality in you I do so admire, Mr. Bradley,' " he said sarcastically. " 'You seem so different from the men at home.' "

Charlotte clasped and unclasped her hands in a simulation of pain.

"Fred, darling—you're hurting me so! Why did I see that quality? Because you were you! I've always loved you, Fred, always!"

"Then why did you write me that letter?"

"I was ashamed—ashamed! Because I—I loved pretty things I spent the money on dresses—the money you earned in this pest-hole—this filthy, dingy place." She waved her hand to indicate the sunny compound. "Yesterday, when I met you on the beach, even with your hairy face and those horrible glasses—I loved you. I couldn't understand. It was strange! A tiny voice whispered, 'You love him—you love him!' And the old loyalty to you said, 'How can you love him when you love Fred Stewart?' Still the voice persisted. Can't you see? I loved Bradley because Bradley was you—dear. Oh, believe me——"

She ended with a sob and covered her face with her hands.

A yearning to believe her, take her in his arms, gripped him. Ah—to be loved, to have his share of the joy that should come to every man, to go home, start anew, pick up the broken threads of his former dreams, splice them, forget the years of loneliness, the gin, the tom-toms, the fever, the heart-crushing letter, the meaningless mode of living—sleep, eat, sleep, eat, for months. To go back with her and regain his body, the strong body that was rightfully his, that the Coast and himself had wasted through drink. He was conscious of the natives in the yard and the smells about the place. To be in a rose garden with her!

He went over and put his hand on her shoulder. The warmth of her body came to him through the thin cloth, and he felt the love of years returning. He tore his hand away as if the woman's flesh burned him, and paced up and down.

He would give her a last test, a chance to tell the truth, all the truth about Robert Bernard. After all, women are frail creatures. He had had so little sweetness in his life for the moment it seemed as if it would be worth while to give her a chance. If she answered frankly, without evasion, he would forget and forgive, start anew. His first duty was toward himself. He did not deserve happiness if he could not fight for it! And the excessive drinking had sapped at his will power, taken away his ability to give up, relinquish.

"Charlotte—" he faltered. "Answer me truthfully—did you ever love any one before you loved me?"

"No, Fred, never," she answered squarely.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite, dear."

She stretched out her hand, palm upward, a tiny white hand with tapering fingers. Stewart looked at his own hands, sun-burned, knuckly, even the hair burned yellow by exposure on his trips of inspection—hands marked as strongly by his particular work as the hands of a laborer. And her hand without a blemish, the perfection due to himself, and Bernard, and others, perhaps.

In Charlotte's eyes, as she looked at him, was a glint of triumph. His rage against her flared up, tenfold. Momentary dreams of England faded before his eyes into the raw lighted scene of the compound, sordid, real. No deception about it, either. He knew that the hot sun hatched mosquitoes in the torpid water in abandoned tin cans, and in the little pools and mud flats left by the receding river. The threat was there, to be met. The Coast did not go about in a subtle, lying way. Yes, it was better than a woman—merciless, but open.

He stared for a second, straight into her eyes. Then he turned away.

"Eh, Bob!" he called sharply.

BERNARD, in the next room, had been able to hear the woman's voice at intervals and had wondered at the melting passion in her tones. And her voice, even after all these years, stirred emotions within him. He also wondered what occurred in the pauses between the rumble of conversation, when for endless minutes there would be no sound. He found himself concerned with Stewart's treatment of her. He opened the door slightly at the very end in time to hear his own existence denied.

When he stepped full into the room and Charlotte turned to face him he spoke simply and caustically—

"Welcome, Charlotte."

At the instant of recognition she half-rose from her chair, stared at him, then at Stewart, her eyes wide and unbelieving. One could see that she groped for an evasion, an explanation. Then she closed her eyes for a brief moment as if to obliterate from her sight the vision of her two dupes.

When she again looked at them her expression was animal-like, the look of a cornered beast. With a fumbling hand she encountered Stewart's glass of gin. Lifting it to her lips, she took a long, manly swallow. Then she steadied herself by a hand on the table. Her fear had changed into defiance, hatred.

"Now that you've got me here, what in —— are you going to do?"

Stewart spoke. Bernard admired him for being able to formulate words at such a time. He could not have done so had his life hung in the balance. The shattering of his last illusion was worse than anything that had gone before. She was cheap. To have loved her—he laughed softly.

"Do?" Stewart questioned. "We will do nothing but keep you here as long as we see fit. You sent us into exile. Now it's your turn to be lonely."

Charlotte smiled amusedly, sarcastically. She reached for a cigaret and her hand did not shake.

"Keep me here?" she queried.

"Yes, you can't escape.

"Very well," she agreed.

Stewart pointed to her hut.

"There is your home for a long time."

"Really?" she asked with an upward smile.

"You may have your meals with us. It saves trouble."

"Good! When do we eat?"

She looked from one to the other. There was a ring of menace in her voice, a threat in the sudden calm she manifested, whether bravado or self-confidence, Bernard could not say.

III

THREE months later Thomas Malloy of London sat in the private quarters of Billways, manager of Kingsley Company, Grand Bassam. After the glare of sun upon the wharf and cement walks the cool, darkened room was a haven.

Billways, facing him, was lost in shadow, all but the glistening expanse of colorless dress shirt he affected. The end of the manager's cigar grew into a round, blinking eye at every puff, throwing the coarse features and red complexion into momentary relief.

The serving-boy came in with a tray loaded with bottles and clinking glasses. Billways removed the cigar, bent forward, and a pencil of light glinted on his silvery hair. He poured out a whisky and soda, which he handed to the visitor.

"And what can I do for you?" he questioned with no curiosity in his tone, just a matter-of-fact willingness to help a white man.

Malloy was grateful. He had reason to dislike interference in his affairs.

"I want to locate a chap named Bradley."

"A friend of yours?"

"No—never met him. But we have some business to transact."

"He died sixteen months ago."

"Can't be!" Malloy exclaimed, startled. "I received a letter from him two months ago."

He sensed Billways' quick curious glance and immediately corrected himself. "That is, he wrote a friend of mine who wrote me—d'you see!"

"Your friend must have been mistaken."

"Where could I get information about him?"

"One of our men, Stewart, has been in Lahou several years."

"Fred Stewart?"

"Do you know him?" Billways asked.

"No. Heard of him."

"I guess every one has heard of him. He must have been crazy to throw up our agency and go bush."

"I thought he was dead!"

"Dead? Oh, no! He sent for his wife, the administrator told me."

Malloy struggled for self-control. What did it all mean? Bradley dead, Stewart alive? And a woman— He felt suddenly the need of being alone to think. And he wanted to get away from Billways before he let out something of his fear, his worry.

"Thank you, Billways," he murmured, and got up.

His bulk seemed to fill the room. Billways, not a small man by any means, appeared short and slight beside him. There was about Malloy's carriage a consciousness of power and strength. His back bulged the white coat with salient muscles. The determined set of his head indicated a cool brain guiding his great body. His moment of irresolution left him.

"There's a boat to Lahou, I believe——"

"Yes, the *Adjame* sails at noon. I'll send the boy to show you the way."

"You are very kind," Malloy returned with a certain absent-minded ring in his voice.

TOM MALLOY was an adventurer. In him the good had been overwhelmed by the bad, and not through any outside influence, but from deliberate choice. The end of the War found him a major in the British forces, with a dozen medals, backed by a long list of daring performances. In the readjustment following the cessation of hostilities, he had found himself tossed about like a stick of dead wood. Discharged from the army a major, the best the war office could offer him was a second lieutenancy. He would be a ranker, a politely treated outcast.

His education was of no avail when thousands of men were storming the employment bureaus. The thought of hiring out as a chauffeur or a doorman—which he could easily have done owing to his size—was disgusting. It was all very well for a miner to step out of a colonel's uniform and go down into the coal pits, for an ex-policeman to take off the shoulder-straps he had worn in months of unmitigated hell, but Malloy refused to accept a like fate.

He had found that he could make a certain impression on women. Why not use that advantage? His path had crossed Charlotte's. They had formed a powerful team, keeping just within the letter of the law, living off the fat of the land.

A trip to France, with the dupe of the moment, had taken him from London, and on his return he had found Charlotte gone. There was nothing extraordinary about her absence. Their business called for sudden moves. He had not worried until the receipt of her letter, written hastily on her arrival in Grand Lahou.

She had not written before because she wished to surprize him with the bulk of her catch. At the last minute she had feared complications, and for that reason wrote to ask him to come down for her if she did not return within two months.

Her premonition had not been without grounds. As Malloy followed the boy toward the lagoon wharf a wave of resentment against her for leaving without consulting him swept him. That his woman could have come such a distance alone and risked so much without the formality of a good-by irked him. Had he not been sure of her love, he might have been jealous. Indeed Charlotte's infatuation for him had been so intense as to prove an obstacle to some of his more subtle schemes. She had even hinted that they turn straight and live in a villa, like other folk.

The boy had stopped in front of a gate, through which could be seen a courtyard and a quay. The *Adjame* was at the wharf, a throng of black men milling about her. The native clerk refused to allow Malloy on board without a ticket, an unfortunate move for the clerk. He picked himself up ten feet away. When Malloy was in a hurry he resented interference.

His victim of the moment cursed in bad English and refused to give the signal of departure before a report was made of the affront. Malloy was at a loss.

A touch on his elbow and he turned to face a tall, heavily set man of perhaps forty years of age, wearing a helmet that gave him the appearance of an overdeveloped mushroom; a heavy mustache bristled in black profusion from his upper lip, and his chin was in need of a shave.

"Wait, big man! I fix this palaver for you!"

The providential helper leaned over the railing and harangued the group of natives in bush French, mingling entreaties with friendly curses, and reached down in his pocket. The next instant a rain of silver fell on the wharf. The clerk forgot his bruised jaw, whistled, and with a preliminary chug the *Adjame* spun her propeller and swung out into the stream.

As she rounded a jutting point of land, crested by a single mango tree, and entered the lagoon proper, Malloy caught sight of a number of logs hauled on the shore. A solution occurred to him, particularly as his rescuer had introduced himself as Leon Charolat, a timber-cutter. He cultivated the Frenchman's acquaintance on what might have been otherwise a tedious journey.

Whatever may have been Malloy's failings, he could never be termed obvious.

ABASE AMUA stared for a minute at the heap of bills on the table. Then his glance passed to the two white men. His emotion rendered him speechless. All that money for himself! Yes, Stewart had said so. With eager fingers he gathered up the blue and yellow bills. The crisp, new money smelled of printing ink. Amua's eyes roamed around the familiar room, to assure himself that he was awake.

"How much?" he asked in a high squeaky voice.

"Four hundred thousand francs," Stewart informed him.

Accustomed to payments in dribbles every three months, the native was staggered by this lump sum. His first feeling was one of joy, followed swiftly by admiration for the two white wizards. Many times he had sold as much timber, but never had he received a like amount of real money. Always some commission to be paid, a juggling of figures, and he would find himself facing the smiling buyer, with a handful of bills that would all too soon melt away in taxes, food for his laborers, a present to a government official.

He wanted to express his gratitude, but his bush English was limited, and his own tongue, though known to Stewart, was inadequate, comprising not more than a few hundred primitive sounds. His emotion again choked him, his eyes watered, his bulbous nose shook. He got up solemnly and insisted on shaking hands with each several times.

"You be fine too much—two good men!"

A sudden terrifying thought came to him. Suppose the money was stolen. How could he be sure, in times when a chief is not permitted to put a stop to crimes in the manner of the old days? If the sum had been metal, gold, silver, he could have buried it as his fathers had done when sailing vessels anchored off the Coast and bartered for gold dust and ivory. Abase Amua scratched his woolly head and spat accurately through the door. Even this consecrated, wit-clearing performance failed.

"You no fit give me gold?" he asked of Stewart.

"No, Amua. Since dem War palaver, gold he no live for this place."

"Maybe—I put this money for ground—dem little things that live for under, dey eat 'em up, savvy?"

"Why don't you put it for bank in Bassam?" Bernard suggested.

Abase shook his head.

"Abase is like all black men," Stewart explained. "He wants his money close at hand."

Stewart went to the sideboard and came back with an empty bottle and a stick of sealing-wax. Taking a few bills from Amua's heap, he rolled and inserted them. Then he corked the bottle, melted the wax and hermetically sealed the orifice.

Amua's clucking surpassed his earlier efforts. His whine became a veritable hiss.

"Oh, massa, he be fine!" He got up, hesitated. "You keep dem money for me for one day. I catch place to put it for ground—" he indicated the bills on the table—"then I take 'um."

"All right," Stewart assented.

His business terminated, Abase Amua shook hands again. He was anxious to get back to his people to claim the invention of the money-keeping process. He knew that Stewart would never contradict him, and his sagacity would be the talk of the village. With a last squeal of pleasure he left, the bottle hugged beneath his arm.

BERNARD computed their commission—at least seventy-five thousand francs. Excitement took possession of him.

"At this rate we'll be on Easy Street!" he exclaimed. "What about that figured wood? Can we sell it?"

"Kessler, the only buyer who comes up here, has his yearly quota. If I could go to Bassam——"

"But you said I should go up-river right away to inspect Amua's cutting."

"We can't both leave. That's a certainty."

"Then we'll have to compromise and risk a chance of losing a sale," Bernard grumbled. Then, after a short, irritated laugh, he went on, "Miss Briggs seems to be more of a nuisance than a pleasure." He leaned across the table, and his attitude became serious. "Why should we go on with this, Fred? Outside of the fact that she interferes with our work, she disgusts me—the sight of her, goggling sausages in that pink kimono——"

"It ought to be some joy to us to know what we escaped."

"Our work is turning out to be rather important."

"But if we let her go—" Stewart put in.

Bernard interrupted in his eagerness:

"It means that we are free—that we can accumulate enough in a few months to give us a good start in Canada. It means that we are made men."

Stewart shook his head.

"This—" he indicated the money on the table— "is all very well in its place. But remember, it was, and is a side issue. The idea was to keep her from working other poor devils."

"Did any one worry over us?" Bernard cried out impatiently. "Did any one show us any pity? I say this altruism is out of place. Let her go hang—we have ourselves to think of."

"What sent us both into exile?" Stewart asked steadily. "Charlotte's greed for money. What brought her here? Greed. And why did we want her to come?"

"To make her pay."

"Pay for her greed."

"Personal revenge!" Bernard contradicted. "Covered with fine words about protecting the other fellow. Let's not blind ourselves. It was to get even for the wrong done us—and we have—she's been here three months—with nothing to do——"

Bernard stopped, silenced by Stewart's sharp gesture.

"I admit what you say is true. You weren't so keen on it. I was a madman. But since I've seen her as she really is—I feel we must keep her from repeating her little stunt on others. I've changed my point of view. The satisfaction of doing something just for principle is a greater satisfaction than that money. We still can make enough. As for sending her away now, she hasn't begun to be punished. She doesn't suffer. Sometimes I wonder if she doesn't enjoy the tropics—the sheer laziness of it!"

He shuddered slightly as he recalled Charlotte.

"It does seem a pity to lose such an opportunity." When Stewart did not reply he seemed to regret his hasty speech. "You're right, Fred. It's the easiest thing in the world to become too greedy."

Bernard reached for the ever present bottle of gin, poured himself a drink, sipped it off quietly without being aware of his act, so mechanical had the gestures become. A few flies buzzed in the thick silence of the room.

Presently a pattering of running feet across the compound was heard and a native runner appeared in the doorway, panting. He announced that the watchman at the river huts had sent him ahead to inform them that a timber-buyer was on the way and would arrive within the hour.

"If we have what they want they'll come to us!" Stewart said with a note of triumph.

"We'd better tell Charlotte to keep out of sight until he's gone," Bernard suggested.

CHARLOTTE sank back on her pillows and smiled. The two men within had made one mistake, not flattering to her. So confident were they of her helplessness they did not watch to see that she kept within the confines of her own establishment. And indeed they had guarded all avenues of escape.

Invariably, when she stepped beyond the compound, she met Sakki, who would calmly accompany her back to her hut. Try as she would, she could not dent the black's loyalty to Massa Stewart. Money, compliments, alike had failed. A scene of attempted cajolery, interrupted by Sakki's pipe-smoking spouse, had resulted in a rather wordy argument between the white woman and the stumpy virago. Stewart had heard of the affair and nicknamed Charlotte "Mammie's Rival."

Though amusing, the incident had its effect on Charlotte. Forgetting all thoughts of escape, she turned her mind to revenge. They could not kill her, so there was nothing to worry about. As long as she had quinin and drinks to ward off the fever she could safely await Malloy's arrival. That he would find her she did not doubt. And in the mean time? This particular day she had taken her siesta in the hammock on Stewart's veranda.

She pretended to sleep. Bernard noticed her with a start.

"Were you here all the time?" he asked.

Charlotte stretched lazily and looked up at him between narrowed lids.

"I've been sleeping——"

"It's a wonder we didn't see or hear you."

"I don't sleep noisily. By the way, you should ask that Amua freak to control his voice. That awful, whiny shriek of his gives me a nightmare." To further lull his suspicions she went on: "I was drowsing. I couldn't make out what it was until he came out. Sounded like a back fence argument between cats."

She noticed that Bernard avoided her eyes. He had not been as ruthless as Stewart; in fact, she felt that he still retained an affection for her. She deduced this because he avoided looking at her at table. Had she known the truth——

"There's a timber-cutter on his way. Stewart wants you to stay out of sight."

She got up without a reply and picked up a large bowl of ripe mangoes; deep green, they were, spotted with crimson. On the way across the compound she ate of them. These sweet, turpentine-flavored fruits and red bananas comprised her between-meal sustainer and took the place of the candies she ate at home.

All things considered, the West Coast was not so unpleasant. That is, if one knew one did not have to stay forever. Home, to carry out her game, she must be dressed in fashion with never a minute to herself. Here she would spend hours wrapped in a loose kimono, reclining in a hammock.

And the stakes to be won made up for the monotony! A chance to clean up more money than was mentioned in the fake will was at hand. Even at the low exchange of the franc she could buy a villa in the suburbs of London, where she could live happily with Malloy. As she thought of him—his strong regular features, the curly brown hair and fearless gray eyes—she could feel him near. He must be on the way. He might even be the timber-buyer.

She reveled in the possibility that soon she might see him, hear his voice. And she must give him cause to be proud of her as she was proud of him. Her two enemies would not dare do anything to him. He was too strong and brave.

She loved Malloy for his cleverness as a confidence man, the supreme skill and resolution he showed in the smallest trick and also for his war record. She had thrilled when she toyed with his medals. He was a dooer, a man afraid of nothing. The fact they made their living in the same manner drew them even closer together.

The uproar of an arrival brought her to the window. The natives were already gathered in the compound. Stewart and Bernard had left their bungalow and were on the way to the entrance of the trail.

And then suddenly, as if dropped from the clouds, the familiar figure came into view. How well Malloy looked in the tropical garb, the laced boots, cavalry breeches, soft white shirt, neat military helmet! He approached the white men with his long, loose-limbed stride, and his big voice boomed out a greeting. His head towered above the gathering.

But when Sakki came forward she realized, to her disappointment, that the native was half-a-head taller, and broader. Only comparison with Malloy showed her fully the gigantic stature of the Kroo-boy. She knew that Malloy was astonished when his eyes traveled upward to the servant's head, the inevitable annoyance of the man who finds himself inferior in the thing of his pride.

Sakki lifted with one hand the heavy boxes to the backs of his men and led the way to the bungalow. Malloy glanced about curiously, expectantly. He was looking for her, she knew. But she kept back from view. There was no hurry. Malloy had always warned her against the folly of not taking one's time.

Many minutes elapsed before the men came out again into the compound. Stewart and Bernard had changed into high boots. When they set off into the tangle of undergrowth she came to the conclusion that Malloy played his game well. Yes, he was even going out to inspect timber.

With relief she saw that Sakki followed.

"What fools!" she laughed.

When sufficient time had elapsed she left the hut and made her way to the bungalow. She found the money in the side-board under a packet of papers and slipped it in her sleeve. None of the servants was in sight when she crossed the compound.

In her room she counted the bills. A fortune! And Malloy, when he knew what was in her possession, would manage to get away at once. They might even leave before Stewart discovered his loss. She would feel no fear with Malloy by her side. He had always been able to cope with any situation.

She called the boy, ordered wine and set about finishing the mangoes. Yes, she was herself once more, keen-eyed, clear-witted. When they entered the clearing she would rise from her chair in the doorway and disappear within. Malloy would see and recognize her.

STEWART was the first to see Charlotte showing herself in disobedience to his orders. But he said nothing, hoping that Malloy had been unaware of her presence.

In the living-room of the bungalow they discussed the terms of the purchase. Malloy agreed immediately to pay the price demanded. And several remarks he passed showed him to be inexperienced in the trade. He had doubtless bluffed his way into the employ of Charolat's timber company on appearance. The stupidity of half the world feeds the other half.

"I didn't know you had your wife with you, Mr. Stewart," Malloy said abruptly.

"She isn't my wife," Stewart explained.

"Perhaps Mrs. Bernard?" Malloy insinuated.

"Oh, no," Bernard vigorously denied.

"She's half-mad," Stewart continued. "Her husband, a fellow named Bradley, died up here and she won't leave."

At this impromptu piece of fiction Bernard breathed heavily.

Malloy smiled broadly:

"Sorrow hasn't interfered with her appetite. I'll bet she's the heaviest white woman south of Cancer."

A long silence followed this. Stewart's jaw relaxed in amazement.

Bernard shifted in his chair.

"I don't understand."

"I don't wish to be offensive if the lady is a friend of yours," Malloy went on with a disarming smile. "You must understand—I often change sidewalks at home to avoid a fat woman. I don't like them."

"So she's fat!" Stewart gasped.

"From the brief glimpse I got of her I should say she's not a—sylph."

Why, had they not noticed! True, they had seen her every day, and she had been over-partial to the formless kimono. Fat, careless of her appearance, her dangerous beauty gone—the two men exchanged a glance of complete understanding.

"We don't like fat women either," Stewart suggested. "The best place for her is—home."

"If we could get her home," Bernard supplemented eagerly.

"I wonder if you would do us a favor, Mr. Malloy."

Malloy raised a comical pleading hand.

"Could you take her back with you on your down-trip?"

"That's a pretty cumbersome piece of baggage for a canoe," Malloy demurred.

"My motor-boat is at your service," Stewart informed him.

"I see."

Malloy seemed to be considering the proposition. Bernard and Stewart waited anxiously.

"Must be rather lonely for her up here with no other white women," Malloy suggested.

"Must be," Stewart agreed.

"What about it, old man?" Bernard queried.

"I think I might help you out. The motor-boat rather intrigues me."

A change in Malloy's expression, annoyance, puzzlement, made Stewart fear that he might go back on his bargain. He wanted to clinch things.

"Sakki—" he called. "Get dem white

mammy, tell her I want her to come here."

Sakki left.

"Don't mind what she tells you," Stewart went on to explain. "She's a nut. Thinks we've held her here as a prisoner."

"Why do all ladies of weight have an idea they are desirable!" Malloy laughed, and then corrected himself. "If the poor woman is mad I feel sorry for her."

"So do I," Bernard intervened. "Perhaps I should go down with Mr. Malloy and put her on the boat."

"That's not necessary," Stewart said, with a glance to indicate that Bernard should not worry. "The Coast is the Coast. Let them draw their own conclusions. Mrs.—Bradley has her passport."

The realization that Charlotte could convince Malloy of her identity by her passport set Stewart thinking.

Before they could further discuss ways and means Charlotte had entered.

◆

MALLOY looked closer. By —— it was Charlotte! Every feature was hers, covered with greasy blotchy flesh, adorned by a double chin, but still Miss Briggs! No amount of exercise or care could ever give her back the former rose-leaf freshness that had been her charm. The loss of her beauty rendered her useless to him. An overpowering, instantaneous rage caused him to throw pretense to the winds.

"What in —— is the matter with you!"

Charlotte's face blanched. Her poor, fat chin wabbled.

"What did you do to yourself?"

"Why?" she quavered, finding speech at last. "What's the matter with me, Tom?"

The hurt of Malloy's contempt overshadowed everything. What did she care if the other two stared, at her, if the whole world knew?

"What—do—you—mean——"

"Why, you're fat, fat as a pig! Do you think I'd have come down here if I'd known!"

She followed his eyes to her hands and for the first time seemed to be aware of the rolls of flesh that swathed her wrists, the pudgy fingers round and thick like sausages, the rings buried in the folds. She bent her head and tears rolled down her pasty white, rougeless cheeks.

"So you came down here for her?" Stewart asked sharply.

Malloy nodded, overcome for the moment.

"Well, you can have her—take her home——"

Malloy turned, his fists clenched. "I could kill you two for doing this!"

"As long as you know her so well you're probably aware of our reasons," Stewart declared with ominous calmness.

Bernard had moved to his side.

"There are two to deal with, Mr. Malloy, and we're not either of us weak."

"Oh, go to!" Malloy suggested mildly. "There's no cause for a row."

"No," Stewart agreed. "We only want you to take her off our hands. We'll pay her expenses."

Charlotte looked up at this.

"Oh, Tom, take me away—take me away!" she wailed. "I'll make it up to you—please. You won't lose by it——"

"Let your two friends take care of you," Malloy returned. "Then you won't be hungry." He turned to the others. "You brought her out here, and you can jolly well get her back."

"You're not exactly an affectionate partner," Stewart observed. "We'll take care of her because our punishment has turned out to be too drastic. I think you might escort her to the Coast."

"As a business proposition?" Malloy questioned.

"Yes, we'll make it worth your while—" Stewart said quickly, and went at once to the side-board.

"You're a greedy swine," Bernard declared in disgust. "That's probably why Charlotte loves you."

Malloy ignored the insult. Bernard almost immediately regretted his remark, for he had found a sudden deep pity for the girl. He went to her and put his hand on her shoulder in an awkward attempt at consolation. She accepted his nearness meekly enough but tried to signal to Malloy. The latter, however, had turned away.

Stewart spoke in low staccato tones—

"Charlotte, give me that money!"

Malloy wheeled and caught her eye.

"What money?" she evaded.

"You know," Stewart accused. "You can keep ours. But Amua's money must be returned. If you don't hand it over I'll call my men."

Malloy had reached into his pocket. He now held an automatic.

"Here's an argument against that move,

Mr. Stewart," he threatened in matter-of-fact tones. "You'll take me to that motorboat you spoke of. If your niggers make a move I'll get all of you both—and then, where'll you be, eh?"

Charlotte rushed to his side with a smile of timid, worshipful submission.

"There is a steamer at Grand Lahou loading timber—leaving tomorrow morning. There are no telegraph stations on the Coast except Tabou. The wires are under repair. Oh, I usually make sure of my ground. Come on, now, move along out of here and do as you're told."

But Malloy had never heard of Sakki's dog-like watchfulness.

AT AN almost imperceptible sign from Stewart Sakki leaped from the doorway and seized Malloy with an irresistible strength. The gun fell to the floor. Charlotte screamed. Sakki looked toward Stewart for orders.

"Let him go, Sakki," Stewart said, after he had picked up the automatic.

Sakki released Malloy, who, enraged by his moment of helplessness turned and struck at the black, his huge fists striking the ribs with a hollow thud.

"Keep him quiet, Sakki," Stewart ordered as he seized Charlotte, who would have clawed with her finger nails at the native's back.

As Malloy pulled his hand back for another smash, Sakki seized him by the extended fore-arm, drew him close and slipped his own muscular arm beneath the shoulder and against the neck. There was a brief struggle. Sakki bent his strength to the effort. Then there was a tiny crack as if a twig had been snapped and Malloy grew limp. Sakki eased him to the ground.

"He be quiet, massa."

Bernard put his hand over Malloy's heart. His face grew white. He caught Stewart's eye. With a muffled scream Charlotte broke away and knelt by Malloy, whose jaw had already relaxed and fallen on his chest. She did not cry out again, but patted his face, talking softly to him. The tears ran down her fat cheeks, and she had the look of a wounded dumb animal.

Sakki bent closer, then shivered in terror.

"I no do it, massa—he be strong too much—I no do it!"

FROM without came the throb of tom-toms.

The night that enfolded the clearing, starless, moonless, like an abysmal pocket seemed to drip down gloom that seeped through the cracks in the roof, emanated from the ground. A puff of wind at intervals came from the forest, breathing a tremendous sigh for this land, new with the white man's civilization, still overshadowed by the ignorance of fetishists.

The festive Kroo-boys were giving Sakki a farewell party. He had killed a white man. Although reported as accidental the big oarsman must return to his village. He had left the gathering to serve his master for a last time and hovered about the table like a lost dog. During the course of the dinner, which the two white men scarcely touched, came at intervals the sound of sobs. Charlotte was there with Malloy. The rhythm of the tom-tom and that of the sobs intermingled.

Bernard watched the fires near the native quarters, where dancing figures leaped and contorted in the ruddy glow like giant puppets actioned by invisible strings.

"We'll send her down by the first white man," Stewart said in low tones. "And let her have our share of this money."

Bernard nodded in agreement.

"We'll be wealthy in another year," he speculated. "Other native cutters will want us to handle their business.

"Yes, we'll be wealthy——"

Suddenly, as if he could not endure the native dance longer, Bernard paced the veranda in long restless strides. The light grew and dwindled on his white-clad form as he approached or drew away from the lamp. At the end of the promenade he stopped by the table and poured a glass of gin and bitters.

As Stewart watched him toss off the drink there flashed before him what a year in the bush might mean to Bernard. The broad shoulders would stoop by degrees, the skin tighten over the cheek-bones. The humorous twinkle of the eyes would leave him, and he would go on and on staring at the bush, stifling all normal desires.

When they went to semi-civilization in Bassam he might roll down to degradation as a drunkard down a flight of stairs. In exchange he would obtain money, money that would buy him everything but the resilience he had lost. The tom-toms would hammer thoughts on his brain, thoughts that seared in like acid, left traces that did not fade with time.

As he saw Bernard pour another drink he suddenly felt himself the stronger of the two. Bernard needed help. He, Stewart, was on the up-grade. The longing for gin was dwindling. He could face things, sober, even the horrible sounds from the next room, the knowledge that Charlotte was there holding Malloy in her arms.

He joined Bernard.

"We'll put over one more deal with Amua, then we leave for home," he announced.

"What!"

"Rose gardens, fruit trees, things soft and mellow instead of hard and glaring—"

"But I shall stay here and see this thing through!" Bernard retorted.

"Do you mean to say you havn't the guts to buck up and tear yourself away? I was batty when you came. You're getting the same way. I'll get this business out from under your feet, leave you stranded here, or by ——, I'll knock you on the head and take you away by force."

They faced each other in the lamp light.

"Well spoken, old man," Bernard said mildly. "May I suggest Alberta?" His face relaxed into a grin. "My little trick worked, I see."

STEWART looked out on the compound and in his imagination saw pine trees instead of palms, thought of a cool wind instead of a tepid breeze, felt his body filling out, the lines smoothed from his face, the feel of youth in his veins.

He was not yet thirty. Life was ahead of him.

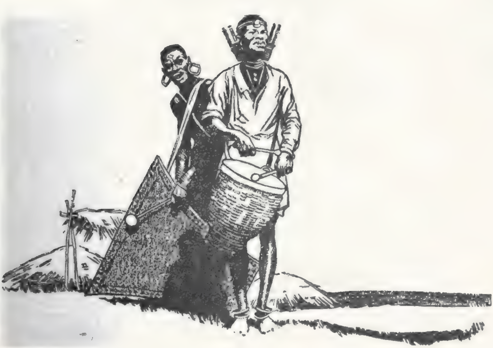
"Sakki!" he called.

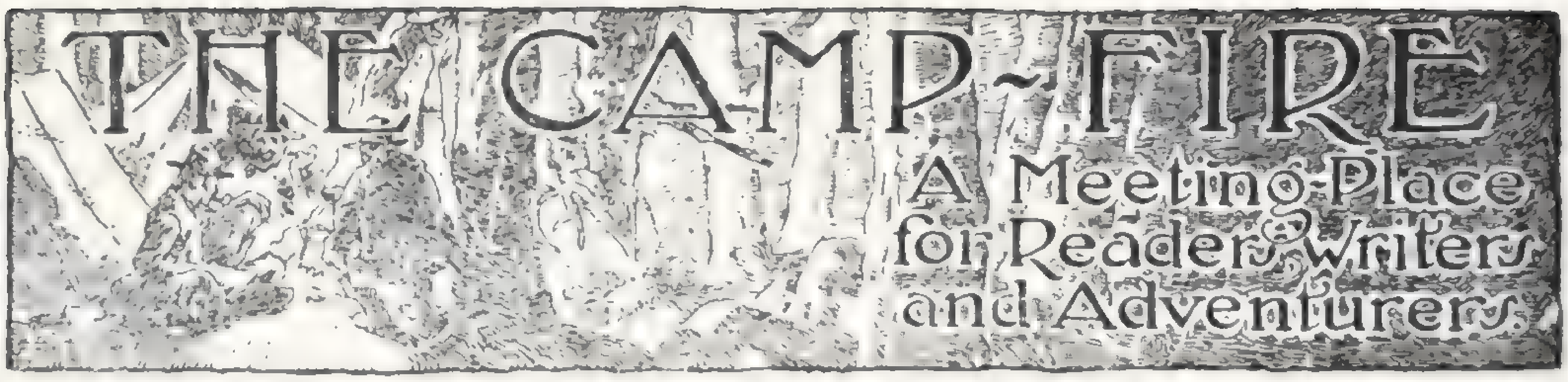
The Kroo-boy appeared.

"I go for white man's country—you come with me?"

"Yassah, massa!"

The tom-toms resumed their cadence.





THE CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SOMETHING from Hugh Pendexter concerning the historical facts upon which is built his serial beginning in this issue:

Norway, Maine.

The register kept by Friar Denis Baron, Franciscan, chaplain at Du Quesne during the Summer of 1755, established beyond any doubt that the commandant of the fort at the time of the Battle of the Monongahela—as the French called it—was Beaujeu (spelled Beaujeux in the register). M. de Crevecoeur was relieved by Beaujeu, and as the latter fell in action no official report was apparently made regarding Beaujeu superseding Crevecoeur, and the accounts sent to France and printed at the Louvre erroneously mention Crevecoeur as being in command at Braddock's defeat. Various historians have indulged in the same error. Sieur de Carqueville was killed in that battle, and Sieur de Parieux was wounded in the fight and died the next day, July 10th. St. Therese was wounded and died on the 30th.

AMONG the Indians present at the fort and participating in the battle in addition to those I mention, some historians add Cornplanter, but this undoubtedly is an error as this celebrated warrior was born about 1740. If he figured in the battle he could have been only fifteen years of age and scarcely old enough for him to have gained fame among his red brothers.

In some reports the commandant's name is spelled "Beaujeau." On some of the maps of that period what I have called "Rea's Town" is spelled "Raystown," but I followed the spelling used in several ancient journals and on an excellent map, showing W. Pa. in 1755. Shannopin's town was named after a chief of that name who died in 1749. The site is included in the present city of Pittsburgh. The site of Logstown is just below modern Economy, Pa. The first was a Delaware village and the latter a mixed village of Iroquois, Mohican, Shawnee, and was the most important trading-town in that part of the country. With the restoration of the English on the forks of the Ohio it went out of existence.

GIST was Maryland born, of English descent. Both he and his son served with Braddock, and afterward raised a company of rangers to defend the frontiers. He died in 1759. One of his sons was killed at the battle of King's Mountain. Gist met George Groghan during his first western journey, 1750-51, the two traveling together to Pickawillanee, a Miami town on the Miami River. Alone he explored the Scioto River and the Kentucky country. In 1751-52 he explored what is now West Virginia. In the Fall of 1753 he accompanied Major George Washington to the French forts in northwestern Pa.

George Croghan was second only to William Johnson in knowledge of the red man. He built a house at Aughwick Creek (now Shirleysburgh, Huntington Co., Pa.) in 1753. He added a large stockade after Braddock's defeat. Fifteen miles northeast of this was Fort Granville at the mouth of a branch of the Juniata. Fifteen miles from Granville, and toward the Susquehanna, was Pomfret Castle, another in the chain of forts erected to protect the border. In 1748 Groghan had a trading-post at Logstown and several establishments in various Indian towns. He was one of the first to see the importance of detaching the Pennsylvania Indians from the French influence. In 1750 he was one of the sheriff's posse to evict trespassing settlers from the Big Juniata, Sherman's Valley, Path Valley, Big Cover, Aughwick Creek and other places, and thus averted an Indian war.

TO REVERT to Gist for a moment. It is interesting to read in his journal covering his first trip to the Ohio country how he left the Muskingum on January 15, 1751, and "went five miles to White Woman's Creek, on which is a small town. This white woman was taken away from New England when she was not above ten years old by French Indians. She is now upward fifty, and has an Indian husband and several children. Her name is Mary Harris. She still remembers they used to be very religious in New England, and wonders how the white men can be so wicked as she has seen them in the woods." This was the same Mary Harris, undoubtedly, who was captured at the burning of Deerfield, Mass., by French and Indians, Feb. 29, 1704. She is marked among those "missing" in the list of killed and captured, printed in the appendix of "Captivity and Deliverance of the Rev. John Williams, of Deerfield, Mass., 1758."

I had planned to introduce her into the story, but as she was residing in Caughnawaga (near Montreal) in 1756 I feared she was not on the Ohio in the preceding year. One of her sons was an officer in the service of France. When Gist met her on White Woman's Creek she was living within four miles of modern Coshocton.

SIR PETER HALKET, of Pitferran, Fifeshire, a baronet of Nova Scotia, was killed at the wagon-train. His son James was killed with him. Sir John St. Clair was shot through the body, but recovered to serve several years in America. Colonel Thomas Dunbar was superceded in November, 1755, because of his "injudicious retreat," and sent into "honorable retirement" as Lieutenant-Governor of Gibraltar. He was not actively employed again and died in 1777. Captain Robert Orme, who helped carry Braddock off the field, resigned his commission in the Guards in October, 1756. He was seriously wounded in the battle and while ill in bed at Will's Creek he dictated a letter to Gov. Dinwiddie, date of July 18, giving him details of the battle.

He attributes the defeat to the advance and middle columns, of 300 and 200 men respectively, falling back in confusion when heavy reinforcements were sent up to sustain them. He said this panic among the five hundred advance troops "struck so great a panic into our men that afterwards no military expedient could be made use of that had any effect upon them, the men were so extremely deaf to the exhortations of the General and the officers that they fired away in the most irregular manner all their ammunition and then ran off leaving the enemy the artillery, ammunition, provisions and baggage—many of them proceeding even as far as Col. Dunbar's party who lay six miles on this side."

IN MY story I have mentioned Gates, who commanded The King's New York Independent Company, and who was later to be credited with the defeat of Burgoyne; Gage, who was to see his veterans retreat in disorder from the riflemen entrenched on Bunker Hill, and George Washington. Gates was shot through the body. Gage was seriously wounded. None suffered more severely than the Virginians; only one-fifth of their number escaped. On this point an excerpt from the "Writings of Washington" is interesting as it is the judgment of the greatest of all the men at that battle: "The Virginia troops showed a great deal of bravery, and were nearly all killed; for I believe out of three companies that were there, scarcely thirty men are left alive. In short, the dastardly behavior of those called regulars exposed all others, that were inclined to do their duty, to almost certain death."

Parkman in his "Conspiracy of Pontiac" makes Beaujeu leader of the attacking forces only, and does not accept him as commandant at the fort. In addition to the register kept by Friar Denis Baron, cited above, there is the journal of Mr. Godefroy, an officer at the fort, and an account of the War Department, concurring in calling Beaujeu fort commandant as well as commander of the attacking force.

I HAVE not used the statement, often repeated, that Braddock was killed by one of the colonials, although I have somewhere in my notes the confession of the man who boasted that he shot the general because of treatment inflicted on his (the assassin's) brother. The purpose of the story, after it has passed the test as a *story*, is to show at what price America learned the value of self-dependence. The battle of the Monongahela established the supremacy of the rifle over the musket. From 1755 the colonies took up in earnest the task of protecting themselves. Incidentally I wish to give credit to Beaujeu, who was a very brave man.

For the witch-craft delusion I refer my readers to Doddridge's "Settlements and Indian Wars of Virginia and Pennsylvania." From this source I secured my suggestion of Hardy, the eccentric, for much such a character roamed the back settlements of western Pennsylvanis in the early days. That Captain Jack, the Black Hunter of the Juniata, and his party of rangers, offered his service to Braddock, and refused to serve when told they must submit to military discipline, is vouched for in Winthrop Sargent's "History of Braddock's Expedition."—HUGH PENDEXTER.

THERE have been quite a few similar requests from readers and if we had not already twice published the Rev. Knickerbocker's sermon over the body of the gambler Riley Grannan, these requests would seem sufficient warrant for reprinting it. As it is, I hesitate to print it for the third time until the demand for it grows even stronger. It's the kind of real stuff that gets to men's hearts and sticks in their memories. Through all the years since we first published it there have been demands for its reprinting, for the issues containing it are almost impossible to get. Still I want to feel pretty sure before printing the same thing three times in one magazine.

If you have any feeling one way or the other in the matter, please drop me a line.

Linsdale, Georgia.

In April, 1918, I believe it was, you published a story by the title of "Riley Grannan's Last Adventure—and After." I think this is a great story and believe your readers will enjoy it again. Will you not please publish it again? Will watch for it. Hoping that you see fit to republish it.—M. T. KINNAN.

WELL, I'll bet some of you can tell him, but I can't.

Boston, Massachusetts.

As to my real reason for butting into the line of real conversation around Camp-Fire at this time will say there has been something trembling on my lips for a long time now (no, it's not a moustache; don't wear one) so get fixed comfy, fellers, and throw on a couple more chunks of wood and I'll spill it. Here goes:

The object of my inquiry has to do with a strange light which has been seen at different times in the outskirts of a little town on what is known as the North Shore country of the Province of New Brunswick, Canada.

THIS is not a hearsay story. I've seen the thing myself, y' betcha. Don't know what it was, or what caused it. But here's what happened. Was on the exact top of a hill, quite a big one, in the road. With me was a young lady friend of mine, when suddenly we were completely enveloped in a greenish yellow light. Was so astonished I could only stand and gape, when suddenly the same thing occurred again. Frightened? Well, I'll say so. My companion was too. Rather guess I didn't appear in a very heroic light, and I'll say I sure wanted to go away from there.

Now remember there was no moon or stars, a cloudy night. Seen on top of a hill, temperature about 20 degrees below zero.

When we got to my companion's house we told her brother. His reply was: "Oh, so you've seen 'the light?' Well, that thing has been seen at different times around here for many years."

Then he went on to state that in company with a mutual friend of his and mine, a doctor, he was driving home from town in an automobile, when, rounding a turn in the road, they saw a light on top of the next hill. Thought sure it was another car and drew out on the road to let it pass. Waited some time then drove home.

DO YOU see, top of a hill again although not when I saw it. About one-half mile away from where I was favored with my entertainment. Dark night too, but warmer weather this time.

He saw it again about six months later returning from skating with a friend, this time on the brow of a small hill a stone's throw from the back door of his home.

Saw it again on top of a hill as he was coming up from the riverbank in company with an employee, about three months later. Dark night this time too. Appeared as a ball of fire this last time and the fellow with my friend tried to throw his hat over it. He's got a lot more nerve than I evidently. I had no particular wish for any personal investigation—me.

1. Now then here's the situation. This light has been seen at different times in this locality, (about one-half square mile) for many years.

2. Always seen when two persons are together. Either that, or when seen by a lone person, that person has not told of it. Had I been alone, you can bet I would have never mentioned it.

3. Always seen on top of a hill, on starless night.

4. Been seen at 20 below and on hot Summer nights.

5. With the one exception of the time the fisherman tried to put his hat over it, it bears no resemblance to the Will-o'-the-Wisp, so called, sometimes seen floating over swampy places.

Come on now, fellers, tell me what it is. I've read everything I can get hold of and can't dope it out. Am not superstitious and am considered by those who know me best very matter of fact. But by the great horn spoon I know what I saw, and remember another pair of eyes saw the same.

Am going to sign my full name and address, but will ask you to use only my initials if you print this in Camp-Fire as I'm in business here and don't want any of my friends to get the idea I'm a publicity hunter.

If any of the Camp-Fire bunch though should want to ask me any questions you have my name and I'll be glad to help dope this thing out any way possible. I confess frankly it has my animule, as "Tut" says.

Go ahead now, boys, and set your intellects to work, because I've quit long ago.

I am very sure the light which I saw was not the Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights. Go into that North country frequently buying lumber for the American market, timber cruising etc., and am perfectly familiar with the N. L's. Have seen them hundreds of times in New Brunswick and Northern Quebec. In fact, have seen them cover the whole sky right here in Boston about one year ago this time.

Am equally sure it was not a light caused by decaying vegetable or animal matter; as I said before, the thermometer registered twenty degrees below and nothing decays at that temperature, believe me.—F. L. B.

UNLESS I'm mistaken, the following from our cache came in response to a story by F. St. Mars concerning the fighting ability of an anteater.

Waban, Massachusetts.

About 50 years ago—which is some time! I read a book of Mayne Reid's, a gentleman who was then regarded as wildly sensational and who since has been found pretty accurate as to his facts.

My impression is that the title of the book is "The Plant Hunters." Anyhow, it dealt with adventures of the family of a political refugee in Brazil; and one episode was a scrap between a jaguar and a great anteater, there called a Tamandua. (Tamandua aussi, if memory serves).

Only, this time it was a female, defending her young: her bushy tail was bent up forward to shield her breast as she backed her corner, the young one behind her; her long muzzle was hidden behind that shield, as she fought. Finally the infant poked its nose out inquiring, from behind its mother, and was promptly grabbed by the jaguar. Disconcerted, the mother for the moment let the masking tail fall far enough to expose her own muzzle, and the end began right there. No need to continne into gruesome detail.—John Preston True.

BACK in 1921 Mrs. Ruby E. Livingston of our writers' brigade enclosed in the following letter an article on Henry Starr from the *Arkansas Gazette* of February 27 of that year.

Russellville, Arkansas.

I have seen him, his brother and sister on exhibition at a county fair in Ft. Smith, when I was a tiny girl. Also saw "Cherokee Bill" shortly before he was hanged in the old Federal prison in Ft. Smith, where many a bad-man was brought from the West—not so many years ago, either. Oklahoma seems to be a favorite habitat for bandits, since they can dash into Texas, Kansas, Missouri, Colorado and Kansas with so much ease and requisitions are slow. Throngs of people used to visit the prison on Sunday afternoons when they held public religious services for the prisoners. I was four years old at the time, but I think seeing those criminals gave me my life-long interest in criminology.

THE Floyd Wilson referred to in the clipping was a district Federal officer and lived next door to my mother; he was shot down like a dog by Henry Starr on a Christmas morning, when Wilson went to arrest Starr. His wife had just taken a cab to go to the station to meet her husband, leaving her Christmas dinner just ready to be served, when she received news that Mr. Wilson had been shot. The shock caused her a long illness and a hard struggle to rear her two little sons. And yet, Starr begged for mercy when Mr. Meyers shot him. The Governor and Legislature of our State sent telegrams of commendation to Mr. Meyers.

Starr's first wife was lost, terrified by the bandits when they robbed a train on which she was a passenger. Starr found her in the woods at night, several miles from the place of the robbery. He promised her protection and took her to the rendezvous in the hills and then next day guided her to the station. A correspondence followed between the two, and Starr visited the girl in her Missouri home, promised to reform, etc., and they were married, only to have him go back to his old life. She always pleaded with him to live straight, and aided him in getting his prison sentences lightened. She died several years ago.

It would seem that Starr was rather brave and daring, until one remembers he would have been hanged in early life had he not been granted leniency and mercy; that he was once captured by a fifteen-year-old boy, and that he finally collected the wages of sin at the hands of an old man, single-handed against five bandits. He (Starr) excused his mode of living by saying it was hard to go straight—yet he had many chances.

THE fact that his sister, Belle Starr, was one of the most notorious women of the Southwest, with probably more marks on her gun than either of her outlaw brothers, shows that the love for outlaw life continued through the family. Thus passes one of the old-time bad-men of the border where East meets West.

The article follows. Our Camp-Fire is an open forum for subjects of interest within our field and outlaws of course have their place in the world of adventure, but personally I can't scare up much interest in them. I'm certainly not one of those who think a man who's made one or two slips, or a man who's really reformed after any number of slips, should be forever branded and not given a fair chance. But an habitual criminal like Starr seems to me merely a rotten piece of work that ought to be removed permanently from society early in his career.

Can't see any "hero" stuff in a fellow like Starr. Just a weak sister with cunning and no more bravery than millions of others possess. If he'd had a real backbone and been really of good intent, he'd not have let his first arrest, even if unjustified, knock him out. And I'd have more respect for him if, instead of blaming his whole rotten career on this incident, he'd had at least enough guts to say he was a bad actor just because he wanted to be.

It makes me tired to see a mess like Starr regarded by any one as anything of a "hero." There are millions of men with equal courage and more sense and real backbone who deserve the lime-light far more than he and don't get it merely because they're too decent and have too much horse-sense to be a nuisance to people in general. There are only three places for human mistakes like Starr—a prison, an asylum or a grave. The last is safest.

Yes, Camp-Fire is an open forum and Starr is a natural subject for discussion among us, but if any light-headed kids among us get the idea that he and his kind are anything to be admired I hope some of you older heads, particularly some of you who've proved your courage, daring and brains in clean fields of action, will take said kids aside and talk a few words of sense into said kids' ears.

Here's the Starr stuff and please note, kids, that he was either a hypocrite and a liar or else so blamed weak that he's pitiful.

When they buried Henry Starr in the little cemetery at Dewey, Okla., last Friday, there ended the story of a bandit as picturesque as ever poked a six-gun under the nose of a frightened small-town cashier in all this Western country.

Starr's deathbed boast to the doctor at Harrison, Ark., a day or two before he died from a wound inflicted during an unsuccessful attempt to raid the People's State bank there, that he had "robbed more banks than any man in the United States," is accepted here as true beyond a doubt by men who have known him ever since he was a romping cowboy riding a range where Tulsa now stands. And that was nearly thirty years ago.

The fatal ending of the second raid that Starr ever attempted in Arkansas—the first was at Bentonville back in 1893—has set these old-time friends of Starr to reminiscing. And many are the tales of his prowess, cunning, markmanship and inevitable good humor and kind-heartedness that are recounted.

ACCORDING to Starr's own story of how he, a well-educated young Cherokee, who had been graduated from the Government Indian school at Tahlequah, Okla., chanced to turn outlaw, he was driven to it by unfair peace officers. Working as a cowboy on a ranch between Nowata and Bartlesville in 1892, Starr, then 19, was arrested on a charge of horse stealing and spent several months in jail before a trial at which he was acquitted. Starr said the horse in question strayed about the pasture of the ranch where he was working and was there for several days before turned into the pasture. When nobody claimed the animal after a few weeks Starr mounted it one day and rode to Nowata. The owner of the horse saw him, recognized the animal, and had Starr arrested as a thief.

"When they let me out I was bitter against the world," Starr said. "I decided that if they sent people to jail when they had violated no law they couldn't do more to a criminal. Having been branded a criminal, I thought I might as well be one in fact.

"I was only a kid and father and mother had brought me up to think it was an awful disgrace to be in jail. They chained me to a bed that time. That was a bad thing to do to a kid. I was innocent. When I was released I felt that I might as well be dead as disgraced. I came out of that jail with blood in my eye."

FROM that day until the day he died, Henry Starr was an outlaw. Sometimes he was not "wanted" for anything in particular. But those who knew him best don't believe he ever really reformed. It was simply in his blood to rob banks, just as it was to gamble, they say. Never a winner at cards, Starr's invariable habit when he had made a stake was to hunt a poker game where, regularly, he turned over what money he had to those with whom he gambled. But despite his lifelong association with gamblers and gambling games, he never was known to hold up a game. He just seemed to have an irresistible desire to gamble, especially at poker, and the only way he could get money fast enough to satisfy his craving for cards was to get it in large bunches from "helpless" country banks.

"HENRY just figured that the banks owed him what he could take from them, is the way I look at it," remarked one old-time friend of the outlaw. "I don't believe he thought it was wrong. I know he thoroughly enjoyed raiding. He's told me of how he laughed inwardly until he hardly could control himself at the enormous fright some victim banker would show when Starr and his men would step in and take charge of all the loose currency with the 'hands up and hands steady' that Starr always sung out."

Starr was recklessly bold. He took many chances. That probably accounts for the fact that he was wounded in more than one raid and captured several times. He was inclined to underestimate the danger of death or apprehension.

IN ALL his career there probably is no better illustration of Starr's daring and his contempt for the law than a short chapter soon after his release from the Colorado State prison in 1913. He was paroled by the governor of Colorado, conditionally. One of the conditions was that he was not to set foot in Oklahoma, the scene of most of his depredations. Starr lingered in Colorado for a few brief months. Then he slipped away from the State and came back to Tulsa. Taking the alias of "R. L. Williams," the name of a candidate for governor, who later was elected, he rented a little bungalow at 1534 East Second Street. The gas and light meters and the telephone at the Starr home were listed in the name of "Laura Williams," Starr's wife. Starr kept out of sight in the daytime, for just two doors from him on the same street lived Jim Woolley, then sheriff of Tulsa County. Across the street from him was a church. Next door to him was one of the city's largest ward schools, and every day hundreds of children played in the back yard of the outlaw at recess.

AT THIS time there was a primary election campaign growing hot in Oklahoma. Robert L. Williams, J. B. A. Robertson, Al Jennings, another noted ex-bandit, Charles West and Robert Dunlop were seeking the Democratic nomination. Probably intending to muddle the situation if possible for Williams, who was the favorite, Starr had his "adopted name" of R. L. Williams placed on the ticket. Probably he also hoped to improve the chances of his old friend, Al Jennings. At any rate it did cause somewhat of a mixup, for there were two Williamses on the ticket that was voted on at the primary—"Robert L. Williams," who was nominated, and just plain "R. L. Williams," who in reality was none other than the outlaw and fugitive, Henry Starr. This also leaked out later after Starr had been wounded and captured in a raid on two banks at Stroud in 1915. It has been generally accepted as true by men who know Starr, but, so far as can be learned, is here printed for the first time.

MEN who associated more or less with Starr when he was not "scouting"—some of them of part Cherokee blood and citizens of high standing in Tulsa—believe that Starr from his home on East Second Street directed most of the bank robberies that were so numerous in Oklahoma along about that time. They don't believe he was living here in seclusion for nothing for the many months elapsing from the time he came here until he was shot down and captured at Stroud in 1915. His deathbed statement that he had "robbed more banks than any man in the United States," bears out this theory, they say.

Moreover, they believe he was just as busy at his old trade from the time Governor Robertson paroled him in 1919, until he was shot and mortally wounded at Harrison, as ever in his life—but that he simply kept his tracks well covered and managed to evade capture. A veteran ex-officer who knew Starr well in the old days went to the chief of police of Tulsa a few months ago, during a wave of daring and successful banks robberies, and told him there were things about several of the robberies that made him believe it was Henry Starr up to his old tricks. The chief was impressed with the theory, but they could get nothing on Starr.

THE eyes of Henry Starr were first opened on December 2, 1873, at Fort Gibson, I. T., near the United States military cemetery. His father, George (Hop) Starr, was a half-breed Cherokee, and his mother, Mary Scott, a quarter blood. He attended the Cherokee Indian mission there until his 11th birthday, when he left school, following the death of his father. The death of his parent threw upon the shoulders of the young Indian boy the duties of caring for his mother and two brothers. Two years later the mother married again, and while Henry strove to get along with his step-father he found it impossible, so left home and became a cowboy on one of the large cattle ranches then scattered over the Cherokee Nation.

He became friendly with a gang of youths who were regarded as "wild," many petty offenses being laid at their doors, and often the Federal officers would make a raid on the gang. On one occasion Henry was arrested and accused of theft, the deputy marshals attempting to "third degree" him. Starr often made the statement that the shame of false arrest so angered him that eventually he grew to hate any man who sought to carry out the law.

IN 1892 the express office at Nowata was robbed. The robbery was done by a party of masked men, who rode away on horseback. One of the robbers rode into a wire fence and was thrown, the horse running away. The animal was found later with a saddle which Henry Starr had borrowed from a friend. A few weeks later Starr returned to Nowata. Floyd Wilson, a deputy marshal and special officer for the Iron Mountain, attempted to arrest him for the robbery.

The men rode up to each other on horseback, both drawing their revolvers, and at close range they fought a duel to the death. Starr proved to be the better shot and Wilson fell.

With others Starr in January, 1893, shot up the town of Choteau, I. T., robbing two general stores and the depot. Several days later the same gang robbed the general store and depot at Inola, I. T.

Starr's first bank robbery was at Caney, Kan., on March 25, 1893, when he and Frank Chaney rode into the town and "stuck up" the Caney Valley national bank for $4,900. The notoriety that he got out of the bank robbery brought scores of lesser known outlaws to his side and by April, 1893, he had formed a real gang.

On May 5, 1893, they held up a Katy passenger train at Pryor Creek, getting $6,000 and a consignment of cut diamonds. Their next exploit was to ride into Arkansas and rob a bank at Bentonville of $11,500 on June 6, 1893. Soon afterward the Starr gang broke up.

About this time Starr discovered that officers were closing in on him, so he started for the West. He met his sweetheart, Miss Mary Morrison, of Nowata, in the Osage hills, and in a covered wagon they started for Emporia, Kan., where they expected to take a train for California, get married and never return to the Indian Territory. At Colorado Springs they were overtaken by detectives. With them was "Kid" Wilson, another desperado, wanted in the Territory. More than $40,000 in cash was taken from the two bandits.

Starr and Wilson were taken to Fort Smith, Ark., then the seat of the Federal court having jurisdiction over the Indian Territory. Starr was tried for the murder of Wilson, convicted and sentenced to be hanged. Prominent members of the Cherokee Nation worked valiantly and succeeded in getting the young Indian a new trial. After a delay of two years, he was sentenced to 13 years in the Federal penitentiary at Columbus, O.

WHILE waiting to be taken to Columbus, a strange incident occurred in the Fort Smith jail.

"Cherokee Bill," a notorious outlaw, a mixture of Indian, negro and white blood, occupied a near-by cell awaiting trial for murder and train robbery. One afternoon when a guard came to lock the cells he found the door of the cage occupied by "Cherokee Bill" blocked by the bad man's foot. A moment later the guard was shot dead. Some one had smuggled a revolver to the bandit.

Jail attendants did not fancy entering the bad man's cell, and while they were discussing means of obtaining "Cherokee Bill's" guns, Starr suddenly volunteered to get it.

Without a word he walked down the runaway to "Cherokee Bill's" cage, swung open the door and entered. The officers, safe around a corner, listened attentively but heard only a faint whispering. A moment later Starr stepped out, locked the cell and delivered the bad-man's gun to the officers.

Starr never told how he persuaded the murderer to give up his gun, but it was believed that a sort of Free Masonry that existed between the Cherokees gave Starr control over the mixed-blooded "Cherokee Bill." His lips were sealed about what took place between them. A few weeks later "Cherokee Bill" was hanged.

WHEN Starr had served eight of the thirteen years of his sentence, the story of how he disarmed "Cherokee Bill" came to the attention of President Theodore Roosevelt and he pardoned him.

During his eight years' incarceration at Columbus, Starr devoted himself to reading, particularly in law. He announced on leaving the penitentiary that he intended to settle down on his farm near Tulsa and try to obtain a degree as a lawyer.

While at Columbus he became acquainted with Al Jennings, another Oklahoma outlaw, who has succeeded in "going straight." That Starr actually intended to live straight is what his friends say, for he made a solemn promise to President Roosevelt that he would be a good man in the future.

"I meant it," said Starr. "Why, I named my boy after Roosevelt—Roosevelt Starr."

After being pardoned he married Miss Morrison, who, with his mother, had worked indefatigably in getting him freed. Starr opened up a real estate office in this city and did well, but the monotony of it soon palled on him. In 1907 he moved to Skiatook.

Starr and his wife were among the notables at the inauguration of Charles N. Haskell as Oklahoma's first governor in 1907.

WHILE Starr believed that he had successfully "beaten back" his criminal inclinations, the State of Arkansas had not forgotten the Bentonville bank robbery. It had an indictment hanging over Starr and when Oklahoma became a State the Arkansas authorities asked Governor Haskell to honor it.

While Haskell was pondering on the application, Starr was pretty uneasy. One day he had a friend call up the State capitol. Later this friend telephoned to Starr "he hasn't granted it." But Starr misunderstood. He thought the message was, "he granted it," and he fled West.

IT WAS about this time that Starr is known to have been rejoined by the pal of his younger days, "Kid" Wilson. Together they went to Colorado for the second time and again it eventually proved their undoing. In June of 1908 they robbed a bank at Amity, Col., and escaped. But after "scouting" for some months in the mountains of Colorado the two bandits quarreled and separated, so Starr later told friends here. Starr said he was afraid Wilson "was going nutty." He grew to fear violence at Wilson's hands.

"Kid" Wilson disappeared and has never been seen or heard of since, so far as any one in Oklahoma knows. Starr, in telling of this to an old-time friend who told it to the writer for the first time after Starr's death at Harrison, significantly said that "Wilson won't bother anybody else."

Leaving Colorado after he and Wilson had split up, Starr went to Arizona. He was safely away from the Colorado officers. But he had an interest in a Tulsa County Indian allotment, and he wrote a real estate man here to dispose of this interest and send him the money, about $650. He trusted this man, whom he had known since childhood. But the trust was misplaced. Starr had furnished the man with his Arizona address and alias. Instead of sending Starr the money, the real estate dealer informed the Colorado authorities where he was and an officer was sent for him, found him and took him back to Colorado. He was sentenced in 1909 to serve 25 years in prison, but after he had served just four years the Colorado governor paroled him. Although his parole provided that he was not to set foot in Oklahoma he quickly decided to risk it here and returned.

HIS life in Tulsa preceding the Stroud robbery in 1915, which resulted in his wounding and capture, has been mentioned already in this story. On March 27, 1915, Starr and several men robbed two banks at Stroud, Lincoln County, Oklahoma. Of this robbery Starr afterward said:

"I staged the Stroud robberies for my son. I wanted to make a stake for him. I wanted to make a big haul, fix the boy out and go off somewhere and be forgotten."

The Stroud affair was daringly planned. The robbers rode into town, tied their horses to the stockyards fence, left one of their number in charge and proceeded to the two banks. Over $5,000 in currency was taken from the two.

As the bandits were escaping, Paul Curry, a 15-year-old boy, ran into a butcher shop, grabbed up a sawed-off rifle and fired at them. The bullet struck Starr in the leg, shattering it. As he fell, Curry shouted to him, "Throw away your gun, or I'll kill you." Starr complied. Louis Estes, another robber, was caught, but the others escaped.

"I am a bank robber, and have been caught; that's all there is to it," said Starr.

His sentence to the Oklahoma prison for 25 years for this raid turned out just as all other prison sentences he had received. He soon won the confidence of the pentitentiary officials, and by his straightforwardness and seemingly sincere promises to "reform" soon had the way paved for another relase. It came in 1919. Governor Robertson believed that Starr had had enough of it. He was willing to grant the parole when the petition for it reached the State House, bearing the endorsement of the prosecuting attorney, the judge who presided at the trial and most of the jurors who convicted him.

"There's more money in the moving-picture business than there is in bank robbing," remarked the Lincoln county prosecutor. "There's certainly no reason why crippled old Henry Starr should hit the trail again."

And Starr went at the motion-picture business with great vim. A company was speedily formed to produce a picturization of the famous Stroud robbery, which was one of the most spectacular in the history of Oklahoma. It was re-enacted, even down to the shooting of Starr by Paul Curry, the 15-year-old schoolboy, who later won a distinguished service decoration for bravery in action in France. Starr made considerable money out of the picture. He was the leading character in a couple of pictures that followed this one.

"He threw away a wonderful opportunity." This is what George Davis, a moving-picture man of Tulsa, said about Starr. Davis had advised Starr somewhat in the days when the ex-bandit was rehearsing the story of his own life at Stroud, called "The Debtor to the Law."

According to Mr. Davis, Starr only recently had received a flattering invitation from a Western movie concern to join them in staging a bank robbery, and the offer indicated that possibly they would engage him for other Western robberies.

Starr was considering the offer when he went to Harrison, Ark., to his death.

DAVIS said that he believed that Starr went back to bank robbing soon after being paroled by Governor Robertson in April, 1919. While Starr was taking "pictures" at Stroud he made a trip to Chandler and by a strange coincidence a Chandler bank was robbed, and later he went to Davenport, and a Davenport bank also was held up.

"No one ever suspected Henry Starr of these robberies, and I don't know that he was implicated in them, but it certainly sounds strange," said Mr. Davis.

Starr always bore the reputation of excelling at whatever he did. He was a crack shot with a pistol. Once a friend asked him to demonstrate his skill. Starr stepped to the side of a pond, took a pistol in each hand, and for some time practised shooting off the heads of turtles as they protruded from the water. During his several terms in prison he always studied for the bar. Those who know him well declare their belief that he could have stood the bar examination and could have qualified as a lawyer in Oklahoma when he left Colorado in 1913.

The story is told that Starr was also an expert at the modern art of camouflage, though he knew it by no such name. Starr himself told this story. He said that when he robbed the bank at Troy, Kan., back in 1893, he was riding a cream-colored buckskin pony. Before riding into the town Starr carefully gave his horse a coating of black paint, on which he plastered white spots. He said he often made use of such ruses. Many times his only disguise when staging a robbery would be a fake mustache, or shaggy eyebrows, or a beard. He seldom made use of a mask.

A CAREFUL study of Starr's career results in the conclusion that he simply couldn't resist the lure of the outlaw life. He knew that it was to his interest to stay straight, but the "call" pulled him on. Starr gave a good intimation of the fight he was making in an interview with a newspaper at Muskogee.

"All young men should know crime is a losing game, no matter who the players may be," he said. "I would not take $17,000,000 to again face the agony I have endured."

As he spoke Starr drew his chair closer to his interviewer. His voice sank almost to a whisper as he said in a voice far more solemn than he had used before: "But once a fellow falls it's hard to rise again."

Three times before he was shot down at Harrison, Starr had walked in the valley of death. Twice he was sentenced to be hanged and his life saved by commutation of his sentences. A few years ago he was wounded by a boy at Stroud, Okla., during an attempt to rob a bank. Starr blamed a woman for his downfall then, after he had striven to "beat back."

In all Starr had served seventeen years and eight months in prison, according to his own accounting.

TO SAVE space, we'll use our smaller type for it. It would get no space at all if it weren't every good American's business to look at what may be behind the charges that fill the country concerning propaganda, a few of which have been made against our magazine. Since the magazine is charged with being both pro and anti English and since 99 per cent. of you know it is neither, the charges against it are not important. But the vast amount of propaganda in our country and the charges of propaganda (often propaganda themselves) *are* important. Those against our magazine can serve as examples. The ones charging anti-English propaganda center mostly on one of Talbot Mundy's Australian characters speaking insultingly of the English King—some of them very virulent letters. The answer is that quite a few Australians have written saying Mr. Mundy's picture of that Australian, including the insult, is very true to life and that the deeds of Australians have proved that such disrespect in words can go hand in hand with entire loyalty to the British Empire. So long as an author draws a true picture of real life and is accused of being both anti and pro, this magazine is not worried by propaganda howls. The type of mind that holds author and magazine agree with every opinion of every character in its pages is not to be reasoned with.

A 3,000-word letter from A. M. Orr, 64 S. Mercer St., Greenville, Pa. is followed by two others from him. My first impulse was to let him talk to you as fully as possible, so that anything even suggesting pro-English propaganda in this magazine might have thorough airing. After his three letters I can't take him seriously enough. Offered to send him letters of those accusing us of anti-British propaganda; he replied he was "not interested in seeing the letters of others." He has the idea that because *Adventure* has carried no or few ads it is being supported by English money, because it couldn't exist without money from ads. I referred him to any intelligent newsdealer for elementary facts on the necessity of ads and to the numerous other magazines carrying no more ads than we. He didn't care to investigate. I suggested that if he wanted to do really useful work against pro-English propaganda in this country he should give attention to the attempt to give pro-English flavor to our school histories. He "desired to say that 'putting one's self on guard' is confined in my home to the protection of my own interests."

From first to last his reply is to "print it for Camp-Fire." Possibly a mere desire to appear in print, but, from the general tone of his letters, probably a distrust of anything I say unless you can all hear it and check up. I'll give you some of the worst of his charges in brief. I don't think any one who refuses to look at evidence deserves much hearing, but it's not been this magazine's policy to suppress charges against it.

HE IS obsessed with the desire that I answer to Camp-Fire the questions I asked of an unknown friend of comrade Marino's in the September 10th issue as to ancestry, sympathies with foreign nations, propaganda work, pay for same, religion, service to country, etc., and to answer "not with flourishes and protestations and what might seem to be evasions, but with simple details." I owe no reply to such a challenge, though I've given him personally the details he asks for, but the editor's past should be an open book to readers so far as it may influence what he says in print. Have already told you my ancestry is American all around for generations back and that I've done no propaganding for any one or any thing except frankly stated causes. My word is no good to Mr. Orr, but my ancestry is a matter of printed record; my mother's family, Sullivant, has been in Columbus, Ohio, for five or six generations and can be investigated there, and my father's there and at Jackson, Ohio. I can't prove I've done no propaganding and been paid for none, but God knows no one can prove I have. A Christian, born Presbyterian, but belong to no sect and attend no church. Services to country very small indeed, but possibly I've tried harder than many. A "sympathizer" with no foreign nation.

HE DEMANDS percentage of English-born writers (including Canadians, Australians, etc.) on our list. Glad to open our books to you—to go farther than he asked and give you the names so far as I know their nationality or even "suspect" them of being English, etc. Of 189 names on our list, 30 are English, etc.: Bill Adams,* H. C. Bailey, Charles Beadle, Ferdinand Berthoud, Rolf Bennett, John Buchan, George L. Catton, Stephen Chalmers,* Captain Dingle, J. Allan Dunn,* James Francis Dwyer, Crosbie Garstin, Mary Gaunt, L. Patrick Greene, Beatrice Grimshaw, Ranger Gull, S. B. H. Hurst, Henry Leverage, Talbot Mundy,* Gordon McCreagh,* Thomas Samson Miller, Roger Pocock, Rafael Sabatini, R. T. M. Scott, Frank H. Shaw, Robert Simpson, W. Townend, Edgar Wallace, F. A. M. Webster, Samuel Alexander White. There are probably others but I don't know who they are; the question of whether a writer was born English, etc., is not a matter of record or importance in this office. Those marked * I know or believe to be naturalized American citizens. If readers feel our magazine can't be straight American unless it bars out or even discriminates against English, etc., writers that can give us interesting stories, you'll have to get another editor. That kind of bigoted Americanism turns my stomach. So does that kind of editing.

MR. ORR says: "Three times a month, more or less, Talbot Mundy puts before the reader the idea that only by having the clever, self-sacrificing officers of England in charge of the affairs of Arabia and Palestine would peace be kept and the rights of all preserved"—"slides into a clever, readable tale a plausible argument which is bound to convince a whole lot of people that we should support England in increasing their land-holdings." I hope the rest of you have looked more closely at the facts. *Grim*, the central character of the series, as already stated at Camp-Fire is an American drawn from a real American doing in general what *Grim* is doing. Throughout the series *Grim's* main aim and that of his comrades is to put Feisul at the head of an independent Arabia. A perfectly American idea. To *Grim*, and to Mr. Mundy, England's control there should be only temporary, a step on the way to independence. Nor does Mr. Mundy fail to state the fact that England as well as France rankly broke its war-time pledge to Feisul. Mr. Mundy has written proof of Feisul's personal trust and friendship and under Feisul's personal letter went safely into parts of Arabia where no English letter could or would have protected him.

Despite opinions of propaganda hounds to the contrary, Talbot Mundy is picturing things as he saw them. It is noteworthy that, of those readers who have first-hand knowledge of affairs in Arabia and Palestine and have expressed their opinions to me, no single one has failed to say that Mr. Mundy pictures things as they are. So long as a writer does that, cries of propaganda are empty noise.

TWO more charges by Mr. Orr, not because they need answering but as samples of what strange conclusions can be built out of nothing once a man sets himself to the job of finding evil—and of how easy it is to label another man a liar, crook and traitor if you refuse to consider any evidence except what strengthens your own argument.

In "Moses and Mrs. Aintree" he says Mr. Mundy's underlying motive is to propagate the idea into us that "we must assist to keep the negroes from making an attempt to colonize Africa with negro people with American training, thus interfering with the vested rights of European nations, and England in particular, in Africa. Can you draw no connection, can you see no coincidence between the publication of this article and the movement among the negroes to establish themselves in Africa? While your magazine is moving out to me, probably through Hoboken, there is reported a 'great parade of negroes in Hoboken' in the interests of sending American negroes to Africa. And here is *Adventure* publishing just at the right time an article to synchronize with the spread of the news about the intention of some of the negroes to do the stunt predicted by the *Adventure* article."

That story was printed in the September 10th, 1922, *Adventure*, on sale August 10, 1922. We in the office saw it the first time November 11, 1921. Paid for it November 17, 1921. It went to the printer May 11, 1922. Mr. Mundy must be some synchronizer and some prophet! Not to mention office ability in those lines. I never even heard of that Hoboken parade until Mr. Orr told me about it. If I'd done any propagandaing on this subject it would have been in favor of the negroes going to Africa if they wanted to. Yet Mr. Orr gives this as one proof of our sinister conspiracy to forward England's ends! Gosh!

NOW an even more exciting charge—the point on which I referred him to any intelligent newsdealer for facts. I've also asked our Advertising Department to send him some of the printed matter of the All-Fiction combination (for advertising only) consisting of *Adventure, Ainslee's, Argosy-All-Story, Detective Story, Everybody's, Love-Story, Munsey's, People's, Popular, Short Stories, Top Notch, Western-Stories:*

"*Adventure* came into existence about 1910 or 1911, existed until the present time with no advertisements at all at first and mighty little now, although it is generally given out that considerable money must be received from advertisements to make a magazine profitable.

"This preceded but slightly, if at all, the various things which led to the secret treaties between England and France which led to the retirement of Grey, Chamberlain and others, and the similar attempts to get us committed on this side, which included the breaking of our treaty with Russia in 1913 and attempts of which little has ever been published to get the Senate to get mixed up in something with European countries.

"There followed a well-designed plan for the organization of the American Legion.

"That seemed to lead by natural design of the High Gods to the Plattsburg Camps.

"And then more.

"It has always been a problem with me just how far you and *Adventure* were concerned with other things. Can you give us any other data on these coincidences?"

No, Mr. Orr, I can't. Not any. Nor can any one else. I don't even know what you are talking about except that you have drawn a wholly wild and very libelous inference against this magazine and myself. To other readers I know it will be merely ridiculous.

This magazine started the original American Legion and I'm proud that it did. The old-timers among you know the circumstances, including its endorsement by two ex-Presidents of the United States, Roosevelt and Taft, and by many other prominent Americans. Did little old *Adventure* dupe all these into endorsing something pro-English or in any way un-American? Or were they all fellow workers for England's profit? Poppycock.

MR. ORR states he was a member of the original American Legion, went to Plattsburg, has otherwise well served his country, has a very American ancestry and I don't doubt his word, but I hope he'll put his Americanism to something more justified than trying to find any kind of propaganda in this magazine. I'm not hopeful, though, for he writes: "If you cut out the propaganda, I will have to more carefully read the *Blue Book* or *Popular*, which seem to be taking over part of the burden lately." And I bet he'll find it in 'em, too, lots and lots of it, though I'll venture my last cent there isn't really any of it in either of them.

You can generally find evil if you look for it. You can find plenty of things favorable to the English in our magazine, and plenty of things unfavorable to them. Or to other nations. If you look for one set of things and refuse to look at the other, you can make out a strong case on either side. That's up to you, not to the magazine.

THE magazine will go on exactly as it has been doing. Both the small number of propaganda chargers and the large number of you who've written in to endorse the fairness and thorough Americanism of our magazine show that it needs no defense except its own pages. If ever even a considerable minority of you tell me that, like Mr. Orr, you find Talbot Mundy, Hugh Pendexter or any others of our writers are doing propaganda in their stories for or against any foreign country, show me how, and convince me your own skirts are clean of interest in the other direction, we'll drop them from our pages. Until then, most certainly not.

I'm not going to go on filling our space with this subject. There are some brief examples for another meeting. After that, any stray propaganda-hounds will get scant attention of any kind. My chief reason for giving so much space to this subject is that I believe there is in this country a systematic campaign to break down national morale and national morals. Such men as Mr. Orr could not be driven to take part in it, but, quite unconsciously, they help it along. At some other meeting I'll try to make plain how, though I can only present certain possibilities, leaving you to form your own judgment on them.—A. S. H.

WE NOW have with us the makings of another nice little argument. The letter went into our cache early in 1921:

Mayer, Arizona.

May I not turn your attention from such things as hoop and pilot snakes and the domestic life of the Gila monster toward something that will be new to many of the Camp-Fire bunch? I am now speaking of fish.

AS YOU will see by the enclosed clipping some of our Arizona fish live in the sand instead of water. As you probably know, water is almost as scarce as booze in many parts of the State, and the fish have adapted themselves to dry conditions. In many places in the bed of the Hasayampa River and its tributaries you can find blind fish by merely digging in the sand of the stream-bed, if you only pick out the right place. Most of the rivers out here have a cheerful habit of running underground except after the rains, coming up for air only when the stream-bed crosses a ledge. In other sections you may walk for miles over what seems to be a perfectly dry wash, yet all the time there is a sizable creek right under your feet, percolating through the sand and gravel. And since the fish have not learned the use of canteens they congregate in the moistest spots they can find in order that they may get an occasional drink.

I don't know what they eat. Maybe, like the denizens of Southern California, they subsist on climate. Truthfully yours—C. E. ROE.

Chairman Midgley of the Prescott, Ariz., board of supervisors declares that the story of the dynamiting of three hundred blind suckers and trout out of the bed of the Dry Beaver, is true.

It occurred on the McIntyre ranch near Bill Back's Montezuma Well. The critters were having to journey a long way to water and the hands thought they might be able to gouge a little spring out of the bed of the creek where there has always been a little seepage. This seepage, it was said, was the only moisture in the bed of the creek for miles. The diggers encountered rock and they took to dynamite. A blast was touched off which blew out a hole about 8 by 10 feet and with the débris, a perfect pocket of fish. There were suckers and trout and they were blind. Some reached the length of ten inches.

It is the theory, according to Midgley, that the fish were gradually holed up in sort of an underground pool by the declining waters of the creek, and when the bed's surface became utterly dry, enough fish were left below to make a little colony. For years, perhaps hundreds of years, the fish remained there, propagating slowly and gradually losing the use of their eyes, but possibly acquiring some compensating sense in its place.

BEGIN now to mark down your favorites for our annual vote by readers on the best stories published in the 1923 issues of the magazine. Results of the vote for 1922 will be published in an early number.

Note as you go along the stories that please you and at the end of the year send us the names of the ten best. This is the best way in which you can let us know what kind of fiction you want to see in the magazine. Any one can note.—A. S. H.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader

In the last issue of each month are printed in full the friendly services of *Adventure* to readers: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons; Camp-Fire Stations, etc.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1, 2. The Sea. In Two Parts
3, 4. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
5, 6. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
7. Australia and Tasmania
8. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
9. New Guinea
10. Philippine Islands
11. Hawaiian Islands and China
12. Japan
13. Asia, Southern
14—20. Africa. In Seven Parts
21. Turkey and Asia Minor
22, 23. Balkans. In Two Parts
24 Scandinavia
25. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
26, 27. South America. In Two Parts
28. Central America
29, 30. Mexico. In Two Parts
31—37. Canada. In Seven Parts
38. Alaska
39. Baffinland and Greenland
40—44. Western U. S. In Five Parts
45—48. Middle Western U. S. In Four Parts
49—52. Eastern U. S. In Four Parts
Radio
Mining and Prospecting
Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
Fishing in North America
Mountains and Mountaineering
Standing Information
Lost Trails

Agriculture in Australia

LUCERNE, a crop mentioned in Mr. Goldie's letter, is more familiarly known in the United States as alfalfa:

Question:—"We are farmers, my wife and I, living in South Dakota. We believe we can better ourselves by moving to Australia. We have heard of the splendid Government there, but wish to know more about the agricultural resources.

Which part would you advise for a poor man to make a start?

About how much is land worth an acre?

What crops and what live stock are raised?

Are the majority of farmers renters or landowners?

Is the country considered semi-arid?

Are there many bushmen among the farming settlements?

Please tell something of the Government and labor troubles, if any.

What is the size of the ordinary farm?

What is the price of a ticket from San Francisco to Australia?

Are there any distinct disadvantages there? If so, what?

What is the range of climate?

I shall greatly appreciate any information you can give me."—JOHN H. EVANS, Agar, S. D.

Answer, by Mr. Goldie:—Australia presents in climate, soil and season a very wide range of choice to those who may desire to become colonists. As the south of Tasmania is in a latitude corresponding roughly to that of the south of France, or of New York, in the northern hemisphere, while the northern extremity of the Australian continent corresponds to the south of India or Ceylon, it is obvious that the Commonwealth must have a great variety of climatic conditions. Its climates, in fact, range from tropical to temperate, missing, however, both the extremes of the tropical and the frigid zones.

Although Australia is preeminently a pastoral country—the value of the return from its flocks and herds far exceeds that from any other primary industry—nevertheless the agricultural industry is of considerable importance, and, judging by the great advance in recent years, bids fair to become still more so as a factor in Australian wealth.

Competent authorities have pronounced Australian wheat to be second to none in the world. In brightness and hardness of grain, in milling quantities and in the whiteness of its flour, it stands unequaled. At present it is not quite equal in the quality known by bakers as "strength" to some of the Canadian flour, but here the experimentalist is coming to our aid, and it is believed that ere long an Australian wheat will be produced as near perfection as could be desired. The excellence of the grain is attested by the high price realized for it in the British markets, as compared with wheats from other countries.

Other cereal crops grown to fair extent in Australia are oats, barley and maize.

Next to wheat, the hay crop is the most important in the Commonwealth, over twenty per cent. of the cultivated area in 1918-1919 being under this crop. In other countries the hay is principally made of various grasses, but here it is found very profitable to use wheat and oats for hay-making. Barley is used to a less extent, and in New South Wales and Queensland excellent hay is made from lucerne.

The people most needed in Australia at the present time are agricultural settlers with a small capital who will help to develop the areas proved suitable for husbandry, together with other immigrants able and willing to work on the land. The days have gone by when "gold could be picked up in the streets," but land can be obtained under such easy terms in Australia that new settlers and thrifty laborers can easily become landed proprietors.

It may truly be said that no country in the world can offer greater advantages to wheat-growers, cattle-raisers, wool-growers, dairy-farmers, fruit-growers, and for raising lambs for export.

It is not possible within the scope of this letter to enter with any degree of completeness into the different methods by which land may be taken up in the several States. Though there is a considerable similarity between the principal forms of tenure in the States, the terms and conditions vary very considerably in detail, and therefore a general indication only of the most important systems will here be given.

The freehold of the land may generally be acquired under what are known as systems of conditional purchase by deferred payments; that is to say, the settler may purchase the land by the payment of small half-yearly instalments upon terms which are very liberal, viz: The settler must reside upon his holding and must fulfil improvement conditions of the lightest nature—conditions inserted simply to guarantee that the occupier will become of benefit to the community by making a reasonable effort to make his holding wealth-producing.

The maximum area which a settler may select in this manner varies from 200 to 2,560 acres, according to the situation and quality of the land. The purchase price ranges from ten shillings an acre upward, and the payment may be extended over a period of from twenty to forty years, the annual amount payable ranging from sixpence an acre upward. The selector must ordinarily reside on his holding for at least five years, and must carry out certain prescribed improvements, such as clearing the land and enclosing it with a fence.

Friends or relations may take advantage of the cooperative or family system of settlement, under which they may form a small community among themselves, and while holding their land separately may assist one another by the reciprocal use of implements and stock.

Under the Closer Settlements Acts repurchased lands are from time to time divided into allotments for farmers, for agricultural laborers or for workingmen's homes. They are thrown open to settlement under systems of conditional purchase by deferred payment, but the land being already improved, the price is usually larger than in the case of unimproved lands available for settlement.

Under these Acts, and under the Small Holdings Acts, farm laborers and workingmen may acquire freehold property near the centers of work, and money is advanced to them by the State Governments on easy terms to assist them in building homes. Special areas are set apart for orchards, vineyards and gardens, while other areas are from time to time specially reserved for selection by settlers from Great Britain.

Instead of selecting the land by conditional purchase, a settler may purchase the land outright, or may obtain a lease for an indefinitely long term—called a perpetual lease—upon payment of a small rent.

For the purpose of assisting settlers in erecting buildings and carrying out improvements on their holdings, systems have been established in all the Australian States, under which financial aid is rendered to settlers by the State Governments. The amounts advanced and the conditions regarding interest and repayment differ somewhat in the several States.

Generally advances may be obtained on freehold property or on conditional purchases for the purposes (*a*) of paying off existing encumbrances, (*b*) of making improvements or of developing the agricultural, pastoral, horticultural or viticultural resources of the land, (*c*) of building homes on the land, or (*d*) for the purchase of stock, machinery or implements.

In the Northern Territory the Commonwealth Government is throwing open a large area for settlement, at the same time assisting settlers in the purchase of fencing, implements, stock, etc.

By taking advantage of the opportunities thus offered for borrowing money at a low rate of interest and repayable in small instalments, many farmers have been able to make their holdings wealth-producing at an early stage, when otherwise they would have had a hard struggle to surmount the initial difficulties incidental to the cultivation of virgin lands.

The Governments of the Commonwealth and the various States are all democratic in principle, and labor has, on the whole, better representation here than in any other country of the world. Labor troubles are no worse than in most countries, and although we have been afflicted by strikes in the same manner as other progressive countries the fact remains that class feeling is not nearly so bad here as it is in other parts of the world.

Australia naturally has its disadvantages in some parts, but what country hasn't? On the whole it is the best country in the world for any man who wishes to settle on the land.

For further particulars regarding fares and other information regarding travel to Australia, kindly communicate with the Oceanic Steamship Co., Market Street, San Francisco.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in alternate issues of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Wrapping Bamboo Fishing-Rods

NO MORE effort to cover the best quality of wood than it is to cover a cheaper grade; and results are more satisfactory:

Question:—"When fishing in the Adirondacks last Summer I ran across an angler who was using a hand-wound rod, and his claim was that considerable strength was given the pole by reason of this reenforcement. His argument was that a medium-priced split-bamboo rod, carefully wound, was stronger than one of the most costly ones without the winding.

I have thought seriously several times of trying his scheme out, but have hesitated going on for the reason that I did not know what number silk thread to use and the method of starting the winding of each joint to insure against raveling. My interest in the scheme was not awakened until after we parted company, and without his address I am unable to communicate with him for instruction. As I recall his rod, it was extremely flexible, and he said it had never failed him even when working large game fish.

It has occurred to me that you may have had some experience in this connection, and I will greatly esteem the favor if you can start me off. The beginning and the end of the winding are the points on which I am lame. Each joint must be securely wound and fastened at each end, and this trick has me buffaloed."—WALTER D. NIXON, Albany, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—You may strengthen a cheap rod by wrapping it full length, but you will not give it any better action than it had. Cheap rods have a nice soft action, but expensive rods as a rule have hard, quick action which takes a good heavy line to bring out. The material is of the best Calcutta or Tonkin bamboo, selected split and dried, and it stays split about three months before it is worked, then is glued with hot glue.

Personally I do not like a rod wrapped full length. If a thread commences to wear, the whole thing goes. It in no manner can help the action or better the material, and the only way you can make them last the time they should for the work in sight is varnishing them with valspar, giving at least five or six applications.

You can get ordinary wrapping-silk for rods from Abbey & Imbrie or Abercrombie & Fitch, New York. I can't draw, but this is the manner to wind: Lay a small part of the thread flat on the rod, starting where you want, and wrap over it tightly. When you come within four or six times around of the point where you want to stop, cut a loop of thread, lay it on the rod and wrap over it, leaving the loop out a trifle so you can run your end through it. Then with a quick pull, jerk it out and you will have what is called the invisible tying, as used by all rod-makers. Try with a lead-pencil before you start.

But instead of buying a cheap rod, why don't you get the glued sticks and mountings of good quality and then wrap? It is worth the effort.

Buying Raw Furs

NOT much chance for the casual purchaser to get anything cheap:

Question:—"Would you be kind enough to give me some information as to the possibility of purchasing raw furs from the trappers in and around Saskatchewan and the surrounding districts? I would like to buy furs and skins and bring them into the States, there to be made into garments, etc.

Has the Hudson's Bay Company got the market cornered, and is it possible to obtain furs from the trappers direct, or do they only dispose of their goods to the H. B. C.? Also what kinds of furs are commonly obtained in those parts, and what are the approximate prevailing prices on the different varieties of furs? Where would be the best place for me to obtain furs, and where could I get in touch with the trappers personally?

I have a friend that recently returned from the Rabbit Lake district with some furs that he picked up; but he does not seem able to give me any reliable information as to where I could obtain them in fairly good-sized quantities, so I am appealing to you for any scrap of information that you will be kind enough to offer, and, believe me, it will be appreciated. Perhaps I have not made myself clear, but I trust so."—M. BLOSBY, Los Angeles, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Hague:—The Hudson's Bay Company has by no means got a corner on the fur market in northern Canada. In The Pas alone 140 licenses were issued to traders last season, and traders start out from many other points.

The Pas, Man.; Prince Albert, Sas.; and Edmonton, Alta.; are probably the three towns in Canada where the greatest numbers of trappers outfit and where the biggest bulk of raw furs is delivered. In a normal season $1,000,000 worth of raw furs will come into The Pas from the north, and some years there are probably $2,000,000 worth.

A considerable quantity of this comes from various Hudson's Bay posts but by no means all of it as there are many other large and small trading-establishments dotted all over northern Canada.

In addition to having established posts these trading-companies send men through the country with dog-teams visiting the trappers and securing their pelts. The stranger has very little chance of securing any raw fur. The old days when fur could be bought for a song have passed, and trappers—Indians and whites—receive high prices for their furs, traders frequently losing on one lot to make money on another.

There is always a chance a man might be able to pick up a few furs from a free trader, but he would have to pay a big price for them and would save practically nothing by the time he had them manufactured into articles.

Trappers for the most part are outfitted by one or other of the trading-companies and dispose of their furs to no one else. Even trappers who are working on their own grub-stakes will sell only to legitimate traders.

You might through one or other of the local traders secure a few pelts if you described exactly what you wanted; but by the time royalties, duty, etc., had been paid I am afraid you would find you had not got a bargain.

The principal furs of northern Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta are white, silver cross and red fox, mink, marten, ermine, beaver, muskrat, lynx, wolverene, otter and skunk. I could hardly give you a list of prices as every day sees a fluctuation, occasionally a very great one.

All the largest fur manufacturers in Canada and the United States have their own representatives out in the back country scouting for pelts.

If you could get hold of a good reliable agent you might be able to get some furs but would be taking a risk of getting caught on a falling market. In 1919 the majority of traders and manufacturing houses got caught in a tremendous slump and many of them went bankrupt.

Victor Amer, Harry McLeod, W. J. Young and Horace Halcrow, all of The Pas, are men with whom I would recommend you to get into touch if you desire to start an agency here. They may be tied up with other outfits, but I could not say for certain.

Again I must warn you, however, that fur is as big a gamble as stocks, or bigger. It takes a lot of money to break into the fur game, and a man must be prepared to stand heavy losses.

Hints for the Hike

RECIPES—the sleeping-bag and blanket-roll—care of the feet:

Question:—"I am a novice at camping and hiking, so wish you would kindly answer the following questions. Enclosed find addressed envelop and stamps.

Please give me the recipe for:

1. Hardtack.
2. Bannock.
3. Sourdough bread.

Please send diagram (with scale) for making the cowboy's blanket-roll, an outdoor sleeping-bag."—D. Mathews, Clarendon, Tex.

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker:—There may be several recipes for making hardtack, but the best that I have ever tried is the following:

Take a quart of flour and a tablespoonful of lard. Pour in enough warm water to make a stiff batter and stir for about fifteen minutes. Lay it on a flat surface and roll thin; then cut out with a baking-powder can top and cook. These biscuits will keep for weeks at a time.

The same applies to the number of recipes for making sourdough bread; some like one kind and others another. Make up a batch of bread dough—the liquid first. Take a quart of flour and a tablespoonful of shortening, half-teaspoonful of soda, spoonful of salt, sour milk enough to make a batter stiff enough to handle. Leave about half of the dough for a day or two so that it will sour. If cool weather, keep near a fire. If weather is warm it will get sour 'most any place. After it is good and sour add warm water to keep it in a liquid state and add flour as you use it so as to keep a batch on hand all the time. This is your stock to be used instead of milk.

Another one is: Take a pint of flour and some warm water and a pinch of salt and make a stiff batter. Soak a yeast-cake in warm water to soften it and stir it in the above mixture. Let it rise and add flour to make it stiffer, and keep beating it down for about three days, and then the dough is sour enough to be used. When you bake your bread squeeze off a chunk about the size of your fist and drop it in your sack of flour.

Always have your water warm—never use cold water. Use shortening if you have it and salt each new batch.

Bannock is used in Scotland; we call the same kind of cakes "hoe-cakes" and use corn-meal in place of barley-meal, oatmeal, pease-meal, etc. A pint of corn-meal, a pinch of salt and a pinch of soda, some sour milk, a little shortening if you have it. Grease your griddle and flop it on it. When brown on one side flip it over on the other. You can add an egg to the above or just use water instead of the milk. Use wheat flour in the same way, either white or unbolted.

Now as to the sleeping-bag: Take about five yards of 10 or 12 ounce ducking. Boil in linseed oil to waterproof the cloth. Take an Army or some other heavy blanket to line the bag after it is sewed together. A hood should be sewed to the under side—a draw-string at the mouth of the sack so that it can be drawn tight around the neck. Make the bag like an ordinary cotton-picker's sack if you do not care about having it lined with the blankets.

The oil will keep out moisture. The blankets will keep you warm in the Winter time. I could make one a great deal more easily than I can tell you how; but still you get the drift of how it ought to be done, I hope. In this bag can be placed your extras. Make into a roll the narrow way and strap on your back.

In hiking do not try to go very far the first few days. Give your muscles a chance to adjust themselves to the work they are called upon to do. A few miles the first days will mean a good distance without discomfort in the ending.

Take good care of your feet. Have extra socks and change every day to clean ones. Your shoes ought to have thick soles to walk in—an extra pair of light ones to lie around in after the day's hike. This will rest them a great deal, and the extra trouble in making the change will pay you in the long run.

Watch out for blisters and be careful about them. It is easy to become infected with bacteria while walking around the country.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Coconuts

THEY make the best all-round crop, bar none, Mr. Emerson finds:

Question:—"I take the liberty of writing you for some information concerning coconuts, where they are grown; how they are grown; how they are gathered, etc."—Mrs. Joseph Louiso, Aberdeen, Wash.

Answer, by Mr. Emerson:—The coconut tree is a familiar sight to any one who has traveled along the coast of tropical countries. It has a peculiar leaning habit, defying the laws of gravitation, and is at once one of the most beautiful and graceful of trees. From a thick bulbous-like base, it springs free from branches to a height of from fifty to one hundred feet. The foliage is confined to a cluster of feather-like branches at the top of the trunk, among which the fruit is borne.

It leans with the wind, away from the wind, and sidewise to the wind, as much as twenty degrees in many instances. It is able to do this on account of the length and number of its long fibrous roots that probe the earth for water. Its principal habitat is near the sea; in fact, right on the very edge of salt water, with its roots in many instances running into the sea, but it also thrives up to an altitude of one thousand feet and back quite a distance into the interior. There are some thirty or forty varieties of the *cocus nucifera*.

For planting, large ripe nuts from heavy-bearing trees are selected. The seed nuts are held for two or three weeks for curing before planting. They are then planted in a nursery, in rows four to five feet apart, and just barely covered with earth. It requires three or four months for them to germinate.

At one year of age the seedlings are transplanted. The distance apart varies according to local custom, and ranges from sixty to one hundred and eighty per acre; generally one hundred per acre or less give better results, due to non-crowding.

The first fruit usually appears at the end of five years, and by the end of the seventh year the "walk" should be in fair yield, gradually increasing until the eighteenth or twentieth year.

The yield of individual trees varies from fifty to two hundred and fifty nuts, according to soil and care of the trees. They are usually gathered every two months. The nuts are husked by hand by means of a steel spike fastened into a block of wood. A man grasps the nut and drives it upon the spike and wrenches it free from the husk, leaving the familiar coconut of commerce. An experienced man can husk from one thousand and five hundred to two thousand and five hundred nuts in twelve hours.

The coconut is the hardiest, longest-lived, and best producing crop known to agriculture, and requires the least work. Almost every one is familiar with copra, dessicated coconut, coconut oil, coconut butter, etc. The shells are used in the tropics for making engraved ornaments and jewel-cases and drinking-cups, also for making a fine quality of charcoal; the milk is sweetened and flavored and sold as a beverage, and a sort of toddy is made by bruising and tapping the inflorescence before the spathe opens; also a crude sugar is made from this liquid.

The leaves of the coconut yield fiber, paper stock, material for making hats, mats, and thatch for houses. The crossed fiber at the bulbous base is used for making sieves and for other purposes. The wood of the tree has many uses, such as making dug-outs, house-building material, walking-sticks, furniture and other useful and ornamental articles.

Any further questions you may wish to ask will be answered.

Tea-Clipper Crews and Races

THIS Q. and A. adds information to that supplied by Brother Beriah Brown in "Ask Adventure," issue of Jan. 30, 1923:

Question:—"Would you kindly give me the answers to the following questions:

Did any of the British clippers engaged in the China tea trade or the Australian wool trade years ago, ever carry as many as eighty men before the mast, that is, A. B.'s and boys combined? If so, how many were A. B.'s and how many were boys or apprentices?

Did any of the above-mentioned ships ever carry as many as forty A. B.'s in one watch, and if so, what ship or ships were they; also if such a crew was the average crew carried or a double one?

Which was the faster of the two famous clippers, *Cutty Sark* or *Thermopylæ*, and what were their respective records?

What trades were the two last-named ships built for—the tea or the wool trade? Also, where did they finally end their careers?"—H. R. Bridges, U. S. S. *Lydonia*, Marshfield, Ore.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—There were British ships carrying eighty in a crew if you include the ships which carried cadets. I have sailed in a ship which carried thirty-six A. B.'s and forty boys. I am told also that the *Young Lochinvar*, China clipper, had as large a crew as you mention during some of the tea races, but she was enormously rigged, carrying a main moonsail and skysail studding sails.

Many of Green's ships carried as many as ninety men, but this was the total crew. Ships like the *High Flier* and *Malabar* were of this class.

The *Thermopylæ* and the *Cutty Sark* were built for the tea trade; and as for respective records, the *Thermopylae* once made the passage in ninety-one days from Foochow to the English Channel; and the *Cutty Sark* clipped a day from that a year later. It is not definitely established to-day which of these two ships was the faster. Each beat the other in turn.

Both went into the wool trade, and both are still afloat. The *Thermopylae*, now called the *Pedro Nunes*, lies moored in the Tagus. The *Cutty Sark*, called the *Ferrera*, is still sailing the seas under the Portuguese flag.

If I have left anything out, come again.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Across the Western Ocean

(Original of "Leave Her, Bullies, Leave Her.")

Oh, the times are hard and the wages low—
Amelia, whar you bound to?
The Rocky Mountains is my home,
Across the Western Ocean.

The Land of Promise there you'll see—
Amelia, whar you bound to?
I'm bound across the western sea,
To join the Irish army.

To Liverpool I'll take my way—
Amelia, whar you bound to?
To Liverpool, that Yankee school,
Across the Western Ocean.

There's Liverpool Pat with his tarpaulin hat—
Amelia, whar you bound to?
And Yankee Jack the packet rat,
Across the Western Ocean.

Beware these packet ships, I say—
Amelia, whar you bound to?
They steal your hide and soul away,
Across the Western Ocean.

(*Transcript from Captain Dingle.*)

Herewith a brief condensation of a vast amount of information received from the sitters-in at the Camp-Fire in reference to that splendid bit of swashbuckling verse "Ten Thousand Miles Away," published in *Adventure* for September 30th, 1922. This song, which originally bore the title of "Botany Bay," was written in the neighborhood of sixty years ago, and was a favorite in the London music-halls of that period. It has for its *motif* a Jack Tar's regret at seeing his best girl, who was convicted of some crime, put aboard ship for transportation to Botany Bay, or Van Diemen's Land, *ergo* the lines—

She had a Government band around each hand
And one around each leg

doubtless referring to her manacles.

Compadre J. M. Rourk, of the White Pass & Yukon Railway, at Skagway, Alaska, sends in the following verse which he declares he heard sung with the other verses of the song, by street singers in Ireland, fifty years ago; it's worthy of inclusion with the original as published:

The sun may shine in the London fog
And the river Thames run clear;
The ocean brine may turn to wine,
And I might forget my beer.
I might forget my beer, my boys,
And the landlord's quarter day;
But I'll never forget my own sweetheart
Ten thousand miles away.

Some memory, Bro. Rourk.

Years afterward some one wrote a batch of verses somewhat after the style of the "Jabberwock" in "Alice in Wonderland," entitled "A Capital Ship," which has at least one virtue: It has preserved to posterity the same old tune to which the original was sung.

Many thanks to compadre A. B. Ostrander of New York for "When Sherman Marched Down to the Sea," a rollicking ditty of the Civil War written in the early 60's. No, 'tisn't "Marching through Georgia." One of these days we'll print it.

Compadre Barrett of New York, who some time ago asked for "Si Hubbard at the Circus," will find that old-timer in Delaney's Song-Book No. 3 under the title of "Hey, Rube." Send 15 cents to Wm. W. Delaney, 117 Park Row, New York.

Compadre Al Coston of Raleigh, Fla., would like to get the words of a song known as "The Rose of Stamboul." There was a movie by that name on the screen a few months ago, but I never heard of such a song.

Frank Haworth of the British Club, Havana, sends in one verse of an old-timer, "The Poor Buffer's Death," the chorus of which runs thisaway:

Wrap me up in my tarpaulin jacket
And say a poor buffer lies low, lies low;
And six stalwart lancers shall carry me
With steps mournful, solemn, and slow.
I know I sha'n't get into Heaven,
And I don't want to go below-ow-ow—
Oh, ain't there some place in between them
Where this poor old buffer can go?

Compadre Thomas Squire of 14 Arthur Street, Yonkers, has a hankering for "St. Anthony's Trials:"

St. Anthony sat on a lowly stool;
A large black book he held in his hand.
Never his eyes from the page he took;
With steadfast soul the page he scanned.

Come up, you poetasters, to the relief of Brother Squire.

Sid Wilson, a reformed cowpuncher who finds it difficult to be thoroughly good in Tuba City, Ariz., has asked me for an old song, the name of which he can not recall. One of the verses, however, runs thus:

It was just before the last furious charge.
Two cowboys drew their rein.
It was hand touched hand and a parting word—
Maybe never to meet again.
"Please take the news to the brown-eyed girl
And tell her I won't be there;
But I'll meet her in the border-land
With heaven and earth between."

They haven't any song-books in Tuba City, compadres. Who's shy?

Compadre E. L. O'Leary of Richibucto, N. B., remembers only the last line of the chorus of a song which has escaped his memory. The song tells the story of an old man, his wife and son, who lived in a cabin. One day the boy goes out for sticks for the fire and fails to show up again. Years later he returns, a grown man, to find his old dad the sole survivor, who greets him as he comes in the door thusly—

"You've been a long time going for the sticks,
You've been a long time gone."

Compadre M. B. Schaeffer, 374 Milan Avenue, Amherst, O., sends in just a few words of that old hobo song "The Watering-Tank" upon which all the hoboes who walked the ties inscribed their names. If some fellow could dig up the complete song we'd all be happy.

Russell Dodd of 1102 Oakland Ave., Ann Arbor, Mich., would like to resurrect a song which his grandfather used to sing, one verse of which runs this way:

Three Irishmen out of employ, and out at elbows as aisily,
Adrift in a grocery store, were smoking and taking it lazily.
One was a broth of a boy whose cheek-bones turned out and turned in again;
Another was Michael Leroy, and the other was Angelo Finnegan.

Compadre Dodd also includes the following lines from an old-time coon song which he'd like to complete:

And when Miss Julie goes to walk,
She walks along the breezes.
And when the sun shines in her face
Makes all the geeses sneezes.

J. Barley, a good scout of Toronto who, with several other good fellows, sent me "The Cruise of the *Bigler*," would like some of us to dig up some lines written about a famous racehorse, "Colin," of bygone days. Here's a few lines that may give some of you a cue:

Oh, new horses shall run and new songs shall be made,
But the fame of the thunderbolt brown shall not fade.
And graybeard to urchin the tale shall repeat
Of the bonny brown Colin who never was beat.

Completely new to me, and listens fine. I hope somebody can help out.

Jack and Polly

Jack:
Oh, now I'm going to take my leave,
My charming Polly, pray do not grieve,
For I'm a-going to the Spanish shore,
To leave my charmer, whom I adore.

Polly:
Oh, stay on shore and don't go to sea.
There's many, love, are cast away:
You had better stay in your true-love's arms,
Free from all dangers and cold, blust'ring storms!

Jack:
No storms nor dangers, love, do I fear.
I will go to sea in a privateer,
And if it please God to spare my life,
When I return, love, I'll make you my wife.

Polly:
There's one thing more disturbs my mind;
Some other girl I'm afraid you'll find.
When you are sailing on the Spanish shore
You ne'er will think on your Polly more.

Jack:
Thousand fine girls, my dear, I've seen,
But none I like but you, my queen.
"Then," said Polly, "if you'll prove so true,
I never will have none but you."

Now this young couple they did part,
With wringing hands and aching heart:
Jack took shipping, and away he went,
And left his Polly in tears to lament.

(*Transcript from James E. Whitney, Boston.*)

Compadre Joseph L. Curry of 596 Lansdale Ave., Central Falls, R. I., gives us three guesses at the following: "Sheinder's Boy," "Grand Captains Byrne and Bell," "I Am Tired of Playing Casino." Send them right in to Brother Curry if you have them—and incidentally me too.—ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

FEBRUARY 28TH ISSUE

Besides the two complete novelettes mentioned on the second page of this issue the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE FORGOTTEN EXPEDITION TO SANTA FÉ ***Frederick R. Bechdolt***
A little-known venture by a Texan army.

HELP FROM HEAVEN ***Thomson Burtis***
An A. E. F. man's training in aviation helps his pitching arm.

ANGEL ***W. Townend***
Confidence men run afoul a blue-water sailor.

LONG RIFLES A Four-Part Story Part II ***Hugh Pendexter***
Witchcraft! The "Evil One" appeals for help.

DIGGERS' LUCK ***Merlin Moore Taylor***
Sometimes brings in fool's gold.

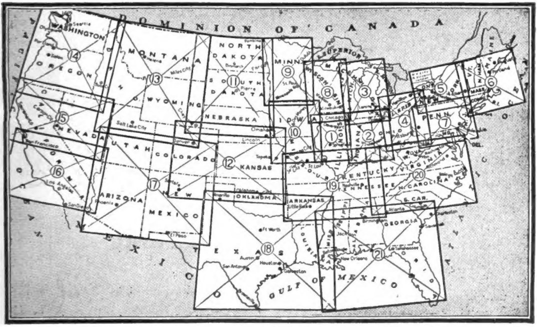
THE DOG WITHOUT A TAIL ***John Beames***
Through the courage of his hatred a dog achieves freedom.

Auto Touring Maps 10c Each

To Adventure Readers

For a limited time we are able to make to our readers the remarkable offer of official Rand McNally Auto Trails maps for 10 cents each. These maps are exactly the same as those included in the Rand McNally 35 cent automobile guides. You save 25 cents. Once used, these maps are a necessity. You can't go wrong when you have them. They tell the meaning of the painted poles that are sentinels over your route. They show hotels, garages, service stations—everything the motorist wants to know. We are offering these maps at cost, purely as a service to our readers.

Any or All of These Maps for 10c apiece



DOMINION OF CANADA
WASHINGTON
OREGON
MONTANA
NORTH DAKOTA
SOUTH DAKOTA
MINN.
WYOMING
NEBRASKA
IOWA
NEVADA
UTAH
COLORADO
KANSAS
ARIZONA
NEW MEXICO
OKLAHOMA
ARKANSAS
TEXAS
KENTUCKY
TENNESSEE
VIRGINIA
N. CAROLINA
S. CAR.
GEORGIA
PENN.
GULF OF MEXICO
MEXICO
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21

Use This Coupon ➔

And Save 25 Cents

The maps correspond to the districts numbered here. They are large (26½ x 34 inches) beautifully printed in red and blue on high grade, smooth-finish paper. Enclosed in heavy tinted folders that slip easily into the pocket. Put down the numbers of the maps you want.

Districts 13 and 17 are published in one folder. Also districts 15 and 16.

Automobile Dept., Adventure 2-20-23
Butterick Building, New York, N. Y.

Please send me Rand McNally Auto Trails maps, sections

number__________ (Fill in numbers desired) by mail prepaid.

I enclose $__________ in stamps or coins.

My car is a__________ (Name and Model). I use__________ (Make and Size) Tires

My occupation is__________

Name__________

Address__________

Can a person of great vitality bring back life to the dying?

SWAN realized her husband was dying. Was he the victim of voodooism? If so, could she revive him with her own superb strength?

Her wealthy father, furious at her elopement, had sent a mulatto voodooist to her husband's plantation to frighten the negroes with the voodoo curse! The negroes had fled, the mules were sick, the crops ruined, her husband dying! All alone, will she be able to save his life? This thrilling story "The Swan and the Mule," by Delia MacLeod will appear in *Everybody's Magazine* for February.

Be sure you read it!

A full-length novel by Will Levington Comfort will also start in February

Everybody's Magazine —FOR FEBRUARY

FIRST IN FICTION :: :: ON EVERY NEWS-STAND